

COVENANT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

BY

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A B S T R A C T

This Thesis is divided into six Chapters, preceded by the Preface.

The Preface explains the concept of Covenant. It examines the Israelite faith from its rudimentary stage and its gradual development; and the relationship between the Israelite Covenant and the other peoples.

Chapter One begins with the Introduction to the Thesis. It discusses the Covenant upon which the religion of Yahweh was based, and as the institution which established a unique relationship between God and Israel. Covenant, it explains, was enshrined in the Salvation history of the Israelites as a saving grace of God. It is therefore a gift made by Yahweh to Israel. The Chapter also examines the definition and etymology of Covenant. The Covenant in the Ancient world, especially, the structure of the Hittite treaties; and the terminologies of the Covenant in the Old Testament are looked into.

Chapter Two is devoted to the Covenant forms in Israel, namely, the Secular traditions, the God-bound, and Israel-bound Covenants, and the Covenant of Joshua. Chapter Three focuses attention on the physical aspects of the Covenant: Statutes, Instruments and Sacred objects.

Chapter Four examines the nature of the Covenant God as an Ethical and Personal Being; the relationship between Him and Baal; the Covenant as a doctrine of Redemption, namely, the religious and saving consciousness of Israel; the motive to the formation of the covenant; and the justification of the Choice of Israel for the Covenant. The Chapter ends with a study of the Covenant people as a righteous people.

Chapter Five is concentrated on the Deuteronomic reform; the idea of a new Covenant; Covenant breaking and judgment; the Covenant in Exilic period; and the Post-exilic impact on the Covenant.

The Conclusion forms the first section of the last Chapter. It gives a concise account of the crucial views reached in this Thesis, especially in stressing the fundamentals and uniqueness of the Covenant theology. The Chapter concludes with the examination of the effect of covenant on the Israelites.

## D E D I C A T I O N

In memory of my beloved father,  
The Late High Chief Abe Osala,  
(Alias Orogbangba)  
the Obanoun of Igasi - Akoko  
in gratitude and great affection  
I dedicate this research.

-----

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It is a great joy for me to be able to write on this very important topic of the Old Testament. I would like to acknowledge my great debt of gratitude to the following persons whose assistance and advice have contributed immensely to the success of this thesis.

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My utmost gratitude goes to God, Yahweh, for the succour and guidance bestowed upon me throughout this exercise, especially during hazardous moments. Indeed, he has actually fulfilled his Covenant with me.

Gabriel Oyedele Abe.

## CERTIFICATION

I certify that this Thesis was carried out  
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## P R E F A C E

The concept of covenant is of far-reaching importance in the relations among individuals, groups and nations. It is a binding promise concerning social, legal, political religious and other aspects of human life. Covenant is therefore a social and religious institution. My interest in this research is primarily with respect to the term in its special religious sense and especially its role in Yahwism and later Judaism as presented in the Old Testament. As it were, covenant, ~~ברית~~ became a paramount religious institution in Israel. It was the basis of the national cult.

The historical and religious records of the formation of Israel as a chosen race presume an historic covenant between Yahweh and Israel; yet the origin of the idea of this covenant is obscure. Could it be in connection with the cult of the Shechemite deity, Baal-berith whose sanctuary in Shechem became a Yahwist sanctuary (Judg. 8: 33; 9:44, 46)? This was the origin of the later Shechem covenant in Joshua 24:1-27, which again is not easy to explain if the Horeb-Sinai covenant was in fact earlier. The dominant tradition, however, favours the Horeb-Sinai covenant between Yahweh and Israel as the covenant par-excellence. It is to this covenant that the ethical prophets like Amos, Hosea and Ezekiel refer (Amos 3:1-2; Hos. 2:15-23; Jer. 7:22-26; 31:32; Ezek. 16:3-8, 60).

The main concern of this research is to present the faith of Israel from its most crucial rudimentary form, to arrive at a new understanding of the religious world of the Old Testament. To do this effectively, however, it will be necessary to delve into the ancient world with whom the Israelites interacted, and to examine their covenant concepts. This approach is helpful in Biblical interpretation, as it will throw some light on the historical and situational environment of the various editors. It is when this basic background has been discovered, that the minds of such writers could be accurately interpreted. The needful impact on the modern society will then be appreciated. To this end, I will examine especially, the structure of the Hittite treaties; these make available an historical precedent that enables scholars to understand the structure of early Israelite thought, as the historical and situational circumstances appealed to the original editors, and, consequently, its functional operation in history.

Yahweh, the God of Israel was understood as the God who initiated covenants. Covenant-making was seen as an activity of God expressed in such features as his love, mercy, righteousness, holiness and power. Covenant became the dominant language in which the election relationship of God to Israel was expressed. So, within the covenant with Israel, we find further covenants, and all the later treaties were re-affirmations



in new situations of the original covenant. The continuity of the national faith was based on the Yahweh-Israel covenant relationship.

Yahweh was the God of Israel, and Israel the people of Yahweh. This concept was created through God's act of deliverance in bringing Israel out from Egypt. Despite changing fortunes and disasters, Israel strongly upheld this faith. However, they departed from it at times, but at such periods the prophets called Israel back to re-establish the covenant relationship between them and Yahweh.

Covenant permeates the daily affairs of all peoples, irrespective of race, colour, religion or political affiliation. In my conclusion, I will deal with the impact of covenant on Israel.

It remains to mention that this work offers the distillation of all my research into covenant at large as contained in the specified area of the Old Testament. The subject matter of this thesis is therefore restricted by its title to the prescribed texts of the Old Testament religious history and related data. Wherever references are made to the New Testament, they are only to serve as comparison and/or clarification.

It is my humble opinion that the reader of this Thesis will find it a crucial subject of Old Testament theology. It is also an incentive for the present scholars of the christian faith to delve more than ever before into the origin of the faith that brought about the theologies which we all teach and practice as Christians. With this attempt, it will be realized that a step has gone beyond mere formulation of creeds and confessions, and the salvation of our souls has been made much more meaningful to us.

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Table 1 : Hebrew Calendar.

Table II : Chronology of Israelite Kingdom.

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## A B B R E V I A T I O N S

- APE - The American People's Encyclopaedia. X, New York: Grolier Incorporated, 1962.
- BBC - The British Broadcasting Corporation Hymn Book. London: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- BREC - The Bible Reader's Encyclopaedia and Concordance. Edited by W.M. Clow; London: Colling's Clear Type Press, 1960.
- CMS - Church Missionary Society.
- ERE - Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics VI, Second edition, Edited by James Hastings; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.
- Fig. - Figure (Figs. - Figures)
- GBT - The Ghana Bulletin of Theology. Accra. Presbyterian Press, 1970.
- HC - Hymnal Companion to the Book of Common Prayer. 3rd edition. London: Vine Books Ltd., 1977.
- HTR - Harvard Theological Review. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981.
- IBC - The Interpreter's Bible Commentary. I, 25th Printing, edited by G.A. Buttrick; New York: Abingdon Press, 1978.
- IDB - The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. I - IV, 11th Printing, edited by G.A. Buttrick; and the Supplementary Volume (SV), edited by K. Crim; New York: Abingdon Press 1980, 1976.
- JAF - Journal of American Folklore. 1943.
- JBL - Journal of Biblical Literature. London: SBLE, 1940.

- JTS - Journal of Theological Studies. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.
- JRA - Journal of Religion in Africa. The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1973.
- LB - The Living Bible. Self-help edition paraphrased, England: Coverdale House Publishers Ltd., 1977.
- NEB - The New Encyclopaedia Britannica. IV, VI. 15th edition, London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. 1981.
- NPN - National Party of Nigeria.
- NYSC - The National Youth Service Corps.
- OTHR - Essays on Old Testament History and Religion. Translated by R.A. Wilson: Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1966.
- PCB - Peake's Commentary on the Bible. Edited by Matthew Black, and H.H. Rowley: London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1964.
- SBLE - Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis.
- SPCK - Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge
- UBD - Unger's Bible Dictionary. Chicago: Moody Press, 1960.
- WBE - The World Book Encyclopaedia. H - 1, 1 and VI, London: Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, 1966.
- WSCF - World's Student Christian Federation.
- ZAW - zeitschrift fur die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft.

## GLOSSARY OF FOREIGN WORDS OTHER THAN HEBREW

A. AKKADIAN LANGUAGEDīnu - Legal lawKanu (noun) - from the verb root k'n - to bend down;  
to do homage.

Kibsu - Social law

Kwn - to stand upright

Nabu - to announce.

Parsu - Religious Law

Salīman Sakānum - to make a concord; to set a peace.

B. AMORITE LANGUAGE

Harayum qatālum - to kill a young donkey

C. ASSYRIAN LANGUAGE

Beritu - bond, fetter.

Biritu - (Assyro-Babylonian): fetter, command.

D. ARABIC LANGUAGE

Sidq - Truth; to be true.

E. GREEK LANGUAGEδιαθήκη - Testament, Covenant.βουλή - A council or an assembly of elders.The highest Jewish Tribunal in Palestine,  
during the Greek and Roman periods.ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη : The New Testament,  
or The New Covenant.

F

LATIN LANGUAGE

Convenire - To come together

Facere - to make

Sacer - holy

Sacrificium - Sacrifice.

G

MARI LANGUAGE

Salimum - Peace

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## CHAPTER I

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The idea of covenant is fundamental to almost all religions and societies. The early religion of Israel in the Old Testament and later Judaism were no exception, the religion of Israel was based on the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel.

From the creation of man, and throughout his period of wanderings and his eventual settlement, he has been involved in one type of covenant or the other. Even today, irrespective of one's religion, vocation or commission, man is not altogether excused of covenant.

To the Israelites, covenant was the result of their fundamental election as a chosen people by Yahweh. The character of the covenant portrays a relationship between two contrasting parties with a restriction upon the elect.

In the political and religious life-history of Israel, all ceremonies and worship were the expression of the covenant relationship between God and Israel. This was made explicit from the earliest days of the mutual relationship. There was the strong conviction that Yahweh was a present help at all times. He was firm and gracious. The totality of Israel's existence, including their land, kingship, priesthood and society was all traced to divine



covenants made with patriarchs. (Gen. 15:18; 17:7-9; II Sam. 7:8ff., Jer. 33:21). The relation of Yahweh to Israel was therefore a genuine one. But Yahweh and Israel were to be close to each other always. When her existence was threatened by such nations as Syria, Assyria or Babylon, Israel was exhorted by the prophets Elijah, Elisha, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah to be faithful to Yahweh. They should not put their trust on the gods of these nations. The covenant, or election, the prophets claimed, strongly depended upon the perfect fulfilment of the conditions attached to it; these were based on moral perfection. Yahweh who had called them into a covenant is a righteous, just, holy and merciful God. Israelites had to reflect these characteristics of Yahweh in their own lives in order to enjoy the grace of God. If on their part they were found wanting, according to Isaiah 1:3-6, 18, they were invited by Yahweh to repent and receive forgiveness, and remain one with him. The Covenant then became the central concept by which to illuminate the structural unity of Israel as a people and Yahweh as their God.

The covenant is also the fundamental basis upon which *the whole message of the Old Testament* rests. This great conviction of Israel's special relationship with God is concentrated in the concept of the covenant not only in the

Old Testament, but also throughout the New Testament. As a special people of God, they believed that the nature and will of God would be revealed to mankind through them. The word "covenant", therefore, was a symbol indicating in a much wider sense the national faith of the chosen race without which Israel could not have been "the people of God."

It goes without exaggeration that different scholars have made various attempts to solve the perennial problems of Biblical exposition, especially, in the field of Old Testament Studies. Such attempts include: Critical exposition: John Bright, Archaeological finds: W.F. Albright, J.B. Pritchard; Sociological Comparative Analysis: M. Burrows; Form Criticism: Martin Noth, Albrecht Alt; Historical Approach: G.W. Anderson, John Bright, J. Mauchline; Philosophical Approach: H.D. Lewis; The Theological exegesis or The Religio - Historical Study: J.A. Baker, W.O.E. Oesterly and T.H. Robinson, R. De Vaux.

I wish to note here, the basic contribution made by Walther Eichrodt, in his work: Theology of the Old Testament, to the covenant concept in the Old Testament. He had dealt with some of the essential elements on covenant extensively, such as, the Covenant Statutes and instruments, and the Characteristics of the Covenant God. But I differ in my approach to this vital subject of the Old Testament theology.

I have classified and compared the outstanding Covenants of the Old Testament. The Old Testament has also been compared a great deal with the treaties in the ancient world, thereby elevating the uniqueness of the Old Testament Covenant. However, Eichrodt wrote long before parallels between Old Testament Covenant and Ancient Near East treaties were brought to light.

The God of the Old Testament is a mysterious God. He moves in an inexplicable way, and his way no one can understand. Yet with the act of faith, one can comprehend these mysteries. This brings into prominence, the unique position of the theological approach to the Biblical exposition, with a critical study of the historical and situational environment of the original editors.

Since the above named methodical approaches have not been able to satisfy the curiosity of some scholars, I therefore wish to follow the theological approach in this thesis<sup>1</sup>, to investigate "Covenant", as it were, which became the basis of the social and religious institutions, and theologies of the Bible, not only in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament.

Israel had a concrete historical and religious foundation of her faith. All the historical or Religious-Historical evidences in the Old Testament, and similar finds outside the Bible, will be subject to ignominy if the acclaimed complexes are not resolved. It is only then that the divine revelation and the acts of salvation can be meaningful. When this vital theological issue is settled, the interrelation of the Old Testament and the New Testament will be duly appreciated. The very terms "Old" and "New" presupposed a continuous organ. The New has not come into existence out of oblivion. It resides in the Old, which has a designed foundation. The meaningfulness of the former, provided ground for the culminated historical revelation and salvation witnessed in the latter. The purpose and the theological message of this research can only be comprehended when this significant basis is admitted.

Any attempt to study the theology of the Old Testament without giving a considerable attention to "covenant", is a deficient exercise. In fact, it ought to be given its paramount position. In this research, it will be well realized that the religion of the Israelites did not surface prominently until they were brought into the covenant sphere

with Yahweh in concrete terms. In other words, the religion of Yahweh was based on the covenant relationship. By this unique concept, the whole salvation-history of the Old Testament would be perfectly apprehended.

Yahweh is a God who acts. He was known to Israel through his activities in their salvation-history. This saving grace of God was not a mere faith since all the external facts confirmed the conviction of the concept of a personal God moving in the midst of a chosen people. The people responded to the historical events shown to them by the God made manifest in concrete history. The binding will of God on them influenced the terms of the covenant relationship and the expressions of a unique faith. Covenant was therefore not a mere dogmatic expression but an explicit description of a living process of history, which had a historical foundation among a living people.

The covenant was maintained by Israel throughout the existence of the Old Testament period. It was periodically re-affirmed in new situations and to new generations. Any subsequent covenant was a re-affirmation of the original one which ratified Israel's election (Ex. 19:5-6; II Kings 11:17; 23:3; Neh. 10:28ff.). All the accounts of covenant-making between Yahweh and Israel have

the following characteristics: First, the covenant was a gift made by Yahweh to his elect. Though Yahweh initiated it, it was not as a reward of Israel's merit. Second, by the means of the covenant, God came into a relationship and communion with Israel. He became their God and they on the other hand, became his people. Third, the rites and terms of the covenant created obligations, which were established in the form of Law.

According to Begrich<sup>2</sup>, the premises of legislation cannot be understood with the notion of בְּרִית. This was his reaction to the third aspect of Yahweh's covenant as indicated above. He arrived at this conclusion probably by basing his views on the fact that Yahweh the God of the covenant is a merciful and loving God. But Begrich ought to have realised that this same God is righteous, just and holy, and as such he must base his covenant on fair and just terms. Covenant-making was all to ensure a healthy and continuous sense of belonging. In fact, any legislation or law without any prior relationship, co-existence or mutual understanding will be meaningless and ineffective. The covenant law was therefore appropriate and meaningful to the parties concerned. Politically, for instance, no

government makes any law for people with whom it has no prior and present relationship. No government, no matter how powerful, would interfere in the affairs of another independent country by legislating for her. If such an attempt is made at all, it will not be honoured and thereby prove to be null and void. The Law of Yahweh was basically reflecting upon the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel, his people. The Law came at the final stage of the covenant experience and at the full understanding of its implication.

As a backdrop to this study, it is necessary at this juncture to examine the Israelites' understanding of the word "Covenant", and its etymology. This will help us to have a deeper appreciation of what was involved in this relationship and the obligations thereby.

## 2 ETYMOLOGY AND SEMANTICS OF COVENANT

(a) Etymology: B<sup>e</sup>rith is close in meaning to the Akkadian preposition biritu, implying the idea of "between" or "among" two parties. It is from the root brh into verb 𐤁𐤓𐤁, which means 'to eat' or 'to drink', implying the festival meal.

B<sup>e</sup>rith is also the equivalent of the Assyrian beritu which means 'bond' or 'fetter'.

(b) Semantics.

(1) B<sup>e</sup>rith: The Prophet Ezekiel agreed with the meaning of B<sup>e</sup>rith as above. According to Ezekiel 20:37; in the Hebrew text, 'Covenant' is a bond. Covenant may be made between two parties of an equal footing, but this is not quite correct with regard to the Yahweh-Israel covenant relationship. It was Yahweh who initiated it. He dictated and concluded the terms of the ברית. Yahweh the stronger, proposed it and granted Israel, the weaker. It was God who called Abraham and made requirements from him. Also, this was the general nature of the covenant at Sinai.

In Genesis 21:25-32, Abraham made a mutual agreement with Abimelech at Beersheba; also in I Samuel 18:3, David and Jonathan made a covenant between themselves. Usually such an agreement was between non-equals. In the above examples, Abraham was supposed to be superior to Abimelech, while Jonathan was also considered as occupying a safe position. Similarly, when the victorious King Ahab made a covenant with the defeated Ben-hadad of Syria (I Kings 20:34), the term implies the conditions of peace granted by the victor to the vanquished.



In a few cases where the weaker may have initiated the covenant, the Stronger still has to grant it. For instance, in Joshua 9, it was the Israelites who granted ברית to the Gibeonites who placed themselves under the protection of Israel. Also, in I Samuel 11:1ff., it was Nahash, king of the Ammonites, who granted a covenant to the people of Jabesh-gilead. In II Samuel 3:12, Abner, the weaker, requested David to grant him his ברית. Therefore, when God made a covenant with Israel, it should be obviously clear that the terms were God's requirements from Israel, his chosen nation. That is, Yahweh should be seen as the superior and "victorious" king granting conditions of peace with the "vanquished" Israel. This again was the general concept of the Sinaiic covenant.

(2) Agreement or Alliance:

"Covenant" is a solemn agreement or alliance. It is an understanding or promise to do something. The word "covenant" in English comes from the Latin convenire, meaning, "to come together". As a theological term it corresponds generally to the Hebrew ברית, and the Greek διαθήκη. It applies to the relationship between God and man, representing God as in covenant-relationship with his own people. It was a leading idea of Yahwism.

(3) Command or Word:

כִּוְנָה or דְּבַר  
ḵwōnāh      dēḇar

"Covenant" can also correspond with the Hebrew word כִּוְנָה "command". In Joshua 7:11, Israel was expected to keep the covenant of Yahweh as a command:

Israel has sinned; they have  
 transgressed my covenant

אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אֹתָם  
as̄er c̄iwiti ʾotām

which I commanded them

It is also parallel with the "word" דְּבַר of Yahweh.

Israel was enjoined at Sinai to keep the Commandments and Ordinances of Yahweh which were the principal centre of the

Sinai covenant; and these the assembly of Israel consented to keep according to Exodus 24:3,7:

All the words ( כָּל דְּבַר )  
 which the LORD has spoken we will do.  
 All that the LORD has spoken we will  
 do, and we will be obedient.

The above concept was the opinion shared by Schmidt.<sup>3</sup>

According to him, the Hebrew word כָּבַד: could be connected with the Assyro - Babylonian biritu in its primary meaning of "fetter" to suggest an atmosphere of "command". That is to say, the primary meaning of the term כָּבַד in Hebrew may have been either "agreement" or "command". However, if the idea that Yahweh and Israel made a covenant on equal terms is also expressed, this indicates that each party of the covenant had some obligations to fulfil. It simply means that covenant creates rights and duties without necessarily placing those parties on an equal footing as such. This is basically the Deuteronomic concept or development over the covenant:

You have declared this day concerning the LORD. That he is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and commandments and his ordinances,<sup>4</sup> and will obey

his voice, and the LORD has declared this day concerning you that you are a people for his own possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his Commandments.  
(Deut. 26:17-18)

Here, both Yahweh and Israel clearly had mutual rights and obligations within the covenant relation.

From the above, one can rightly infer also, that the primary meaning of the Hebrew אָוֶרְתָּ may have been either "agreement" or "command". It may be interesting to suggest that, on the part of the superior, the covenant is a "command", while on the part of the inferior, it is an "agreement". In a further development of the concept of God's superiority, Yahweh is considered as granting special grace to Israel, that he would dwell among them. He would welcome their approach to him in the tabernacle, the tent of the LORD, or the temple which were all considered as God's dwelling place. It was in the Holy of Holies that his mercy seat, representing his physical presence, was kept.

(4) Witness:

Every Covenant in the Old Testament had a religious significance. Sacrifices usually accompanied most of them, and very often the presence of the divine was invoked, and God thereby becomes the witness of the covenant. In the Laban-Jacob covenant (according to Genesis 31:50) God was the witness and the third partner, and gave strength to the binding of the covenant. This was necessary among the Israelites because of their parent-god relationship with Yahweh. Every covenant was therefore concluded before Yahweh (I Sam. 23:18; II Sam. 5:3; II Kgs. 23:3).

However, when God was one of the two partners of the covenant, he initiated the covenant, and there was no need for the third partner to conclude or establish it. But the covenant would be valid only if Israel responded obediently and faithfully to the terms prescribed in the covenant. It is interesting to note that the Old Testament mentions the local god of Shechem El-Berith or Baäl-Berith (Judg. 9:4, 46) whose relationship with the sons of Hamor, i.e., the Shechemites (Gen. 34:2), was bound by a covenant. There was no third party required. There were also examples of covenants concluded by deities outside Israel which were binding and

effective without human or third party involvement. According to E. Jacob<sup>5</sup>, "The king of Lagash, Urukagina (C.2,400 B.C.) imposes on his subjects the word that his king Ningirsu had pronounced", and ended the list of his laws with these words: "With Ningirsu Urukagina concluded this treaty."

It would be a wrong notion to assert that a third party, mediator or witness was always required in any covenant-making. But it is certain that as the concept of covenant developed the importance of the mediator became more meaningful. It is believed that Moses was most probably the earliest mediator; the kings and priests later took over this role in Israel; and there was the futuristic hope that the Messiah would function as mediator.

(5) Contract:

ברית is also a contract. The granting of a ברית is not made without the observance of certain conditions, especially on the part of the recipient. For instance, David was quite willing to make a covenant with Abner, but only on the condition that Abner returned Michael, David's former wife, to him (II Sam. 3:13). Once this was done, the ברית became a contract binding on each party to fulfil the obligations required by the covenant. In the case of

the covenant between Jonathan and David, even though it appears that it was Jonathan who imposed the covenant on David in order for the rites to be effective, the same covenant had<sup>f</sup> to be concluded jointly by the two partners (I Sam. 23:16). This is well illustrated in the covenant between Laban and Jacob. Laban said, "come now, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be a witness between you and me." (Gen. 31:44).

(6) Peace:

The covenant guaranteed a relationship which is commonly designated by the word: שָׁלוֹם: meaning "peace". Peace does not mean an equivalent of covenant as such, but it designates a state of harmonious agreement, and the balancing of all claims and needs between two parties. This was the effect of the שָׁלוֹם between Yahweh and Israel. When this harmonious peace was marred, God said: "Come now let us reason together." (Isa. 1:18). Covenant established peace not only between God and man, but also between man and man. (Gen. 31:44; I Sam. 28:9f.)

(7) Conclusion or Establishment:

קָרַח

The conclusion of a covenant may take the form of oath-taking as in the case of the covenant between Joshua and the Gibeonites at Gilgal (Jos. 9:15). It may also take the form of sharing a garment as in the case of David and Jonathan (I Sam. 18:3-4). According to Genesis 26:30; 31:46, 54; and II Samuel 3:20, a covenant was concluded by taking a meal. One of the most ancient rites, which was very common among the semitic people and the ancient Near East, as we shall examine very shortly, was to pass between the two halves of the beast that was slaughtered for the purpose of covenant establishment. This was a gesture taken by the participants to suffer the lot of the victim in the event of their breaking the terms of the covenant. This practice is called קָרַח קָרַח: i.e., "to cut a covenant". Once an agreement was thus reached, the covenant terms became binding on both parties.

In order to appreciate the covenant forms in the Old Testament, it is a matter of paramount importance to look into covenant making in the ancient world of which early Israel was a part.



## 3 COVENANT IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Covenant in the ancient world is best considered as treaty. It is a solemn agreement by which societies attempted to regularize the behaviour of both individuals, and social organizations. It was a promise that is sanctioned by an oath, accompanied by an appeal to a deity to "see" or "watch over" i.e., to witness the behaviour of the swearer. Violation of the treaty was to bring about the curses stipulated or implied in the swearing of the oath.

The Hittite language, and the Babylonian as well, never had a single word for "contract", "treaty" or "covenant". In both languages the treaty was designated by a phrase which can be translated literally as "oaths" and "bonds". The treaty was regularly spoken of as an act of the sovereign's favour to his vassal. It was the sovereign's treaty. He was the author or the initiator, and as such he dictated the terms of the treaty. The specific obligations imposed upon the vassal by the superior or king were called the "words of the sovereign" - that is, the great king has spoken or commanded. He must be obeyed.

The most important function of treaties for some thousand years before the Mosaic covenant (of the thirteenth

century B.C.), was in connection with the creation of a new relationship.<sup>6</sup> According to the Mari documents, such a treaty was called Salimum, a "peace". This indicates a peaceful co-existence between two parties, usually those who had been on bad terms, especially between the oppressor and the vanquished.

Most of the evidence for international treaties in the ancient world comes from Hittite sources. These were contemporary with the events that preceded and led up to the formation of the ancient Israelite federation of tribes in Palestine. According to Korosec,<sup>7</sup> the Hittite treaty texts exhibited some elements in their treaty which were not extremely rigid. The treaty forms could be varied, but the following six element structure was common.

1. The Preamble:

This names the overlord who grants the treaty to his vassals **in his royal glory and as demonstration** of political power. The necessity for the treaty is mentioned here.

## 2. The Historical Prologue:

This clause describes the previous relationship between the two parties in some detail. Usually, the commendable benevolence of the Great King is emphasized here. This was to justify the claim of the superior that he was being gracious over the vassal to have granted him a treaty. Therefore, to continue to enjoy the benefits of being in relation with the superior, it was expected that the vassal would continue to be faithful and obedient to the treaty. Their obedience would thus demonstrate their gratitude for the obligations granted them.

## 3. The Stipulations:

These took the form of the ancient Mesopotamian Law Codes otherwise referred to as case law. They define the obligations binding on the vassals in certain circumstances. There were other stipulations which are called "apodictic law". These were regulations in the form of a command. They dealt with military assistance, the treatment of fugitives, and foreign policy.

#### 4. Provisions for Deposit and Public Reading:

Provision was made for the deposit of the treaty in the temple and for periodic public reading. Since the temple was the house of the god, the written document should therefore be kept under his safe custody for his watchful attention. The treaty obligations were also binding upon the vassals' citizenry. At stipulated intervals, the text was read publicly to the assembly to serve both as a reminder and as a warning.

#### 5. Witness:

Apart from the deities of both parties involved in the treaty there was a list of witnesses to the treaty. Among such were deified elements of the natural world, such as mountains, rivers, heaven and earth, wind and cloud.

Man and the society depend upon these witnesses because they are beyond human control. Their powers were invoked to apply the supernatural sanctions of the treaty

#### 6. Formulas for Curses and Blessings:

The formulas furnish both negative and positive motivations for strict obedience to the treaty obligations.

The curses included the natural and historical calamities beyond human control, such as disease, famine, death without posterity, and destruction of the society itself. The reverse of the above were the blessings, namely, prosperity, peace, long life, and continuity of the kingship and society of the vassal.<sup>8</sup>

Hittite culture was rich with rituals. In the light of this, it is believed that some elaborate treaty probably accompanied the ratification of covenant.

There are great similarities between the Hittite treaty structure and the biblical tradition of the sinaitic covenant. G. E. Mendenhall,<sup>9</sup> was the first person to draw attention to this Hittite-Israel resemblance, especially with the Sinaitic covenant in Exodus 19-24; and Joshua 24.

The actual ceremony with which the parties entered into treaty took numerous forms. We hear of a treaty which was made by eating together, another by use of water or oil, another by drinking of a cup. There was another called "puppy and lettuce", a sort of meal. There was a case in which the representative of the king of Mari (an important city on the Mid-East of Euphrates in the early

Millenium), when he was called on to function at a treaty-making ceremony, refused to have the treaty established by "puppy and lettuce", and instead preferred that the ceremony use the more common one of killing a young donkey. The most widely accepted form of entering into a treaty involved cutting up an animal. The person entering into the treaty was identified with the animal.

Archaeological finds in recent years have thrown more light on the similarities between treaty-making in the Ancient Semitic world and the covenant-making of the Bible. Both language and rites are similar. At Mari, for instance, the Amorite idiom meaning to make a treaty is "harayum gatālum", that is, "to kill a young donkey". The Akkadian translation of the same idiom is "Salīmam Sakānum", that is, "to make a concord", or "to set a peace". A number of the ancient texts suggest the use of a young duck or a goat to achieve this objective. Thus, the Amorite example also confirms the origin of what is in the Bible: Karat b<sup>e</sup>ryat, that is, "to cut a covenant", which refers to the ceremony of cutting up an animal to establish a covenant. However, it is not exclusively final to draw the conclusion

that the formal similarity to biblical traditions is beyond controversy.<sup>10</sup> For instance, in the Mosaic covenant, the preamble simply names Yahweh as the God (of Israel) who in his political power and glory brought his people out from the bondage of Egypt. Unlike the Hittite treaty, the necessity for the covenant is not mentioned here, although this was well known to Israel. (Ex. 20:1; 19:1-6). Also, it would be noted that in the Sinaiic covenant, the historical prologue, though short, was not separated from the preamble; that is, from the identification of the covenant-giver. I wish to deal more extensively on this issue of similarity and otherwise in the next chapter. Suffice it to say here, that whichever forms covenant took in ancient Israel and their subsequent development, the religious uniqueness of the Yahweh-Israel covenant relation in the Old Testament had no parallel elsewhere in the ancient world.

Before I go on to discuss the various covenant traditions in the Old Testament, I consider it appropriate to call attention to a few terminologies as they are connected with the covenant cultus.

#### 4. TERMINOLOGIES OF COVENANT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

There are certain terms in the Old Testament other than אֱלֹהִים which express the covenant relation of Israel and Yahweh. It is necessary for us to examine some of them in accordance with the specific meaning they intended within each context. These terms were used in connection with Yahweh, man and things, thereby connoting different meanings at different circumstances.

(a) קֹדֶשׁ: Holy. The word "holy" is usually a moral attribute associated with God. But in some cases it may simply be employed to describe God as divine, i.e., the Holy One of Israel, meaning, the divine God of Israel, or the heavenly or transcendent God. When this same term is used for a thing or man, this simply indicates that such thing or man belongs exclusively to Yahweh; such *must* be wholly dedicated to God.

It will be unacceptable to suggest that when a thing or man is referred to as holy, that it denotes a moral attribute. It can only mean that it belongs to God, the holy One, because by nature nothing is holy until it is made holy if suitable for the purpose. For instance, only



an unblemished animal could be set aside for Yahweh's offering. In such cases, the thing is dedicated and it becomes holy to God. This is also true of a place set aside for Yahweh. For example, קֹדֶשׁ: "a holy place" was the tabernacle dedicated to Yahweh. Once any dedicated object was defiled, it was no longer fit for any religious purpose. Numbers 5:3, says: "... that they may not defile their camp, in the midst of which I dwell." Any thing belonging to Yahweh must be exclusively holy. His dwelling place (seat) in the tabernacle is called קֹדֶשׁ קֹדֶשׁ - "The holy of holies" or "the most holy place". No one dared enter it save the high priest, and then only once a year, on the day of Atonement, after the high priest must have offered sin-offering for self-sanctification to be fit to appear in the holy of holies.

In Numbers 16:3-5, Korah and his company challenged the claim of the exclusive priesthood of Aaron, when they said: "You have gone too far! For all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them; why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" Moses then replied to him thus: "In the morning the LORD will show who is his, and who is holy, and will cause him

to come near to him." From the above passage, it is clearly shown that when the term "holy" is used for man in Israel, or the nation as a whole, just as in the case of any object or place, this signifies that they are the exclusive possession of Yahweh, the Holy One. Such things or persons are set apart or dedicated, and by virtue of this they became holy possessions of Yahweh. This is the theological meaning of Israel being referred to as a peculiar people.

(b) קִדְּוָה : Holiness. The word "holiness" suggests that before a thing or person becomes holy such thing or person must have been taken out of something or persons which are not holy or peculiar. They are simply common. This does not suggest that such common things or persons are profane. They are not the opposite of holy as such. But simply that the holy person or thing has been elevated above the common.

Once a thing becomes holy the idea of inviolability is closely connected with it. According to II Samuel 6:7, when Uzzah wanted to defend the ark from falling, he was struck dead. Similarly, when the men of Beth-Shemesh

looked into the ark of the LORD, seventy of them were slain. The people then remarked: "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God?" (I Sam. 6:19-20). This doctrine of inviolability of the "holy" thing or person was strongly championed by Isaiah of Jerusalem. He persuaded King Ahaz to put all his trust in Yahweh because God would deliver him from the Syro-Euphramite Coalition and the Assyrian threats, and Jerusalem would not be violated<sup>11</sup> (Isa. 7; 10:24-26).

Israel being dedicated to Yahweh was highly charged to be holy as Yahweh is holy. Leviticus 11:44, says: "...consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy." But what does this mean? It is most improbable to suggest that as Yahweh is holy, so Israel is holy. This expression simply means that Israel is dedicated to Yahweh as a holy possession. This is the implication of the covenant relation. Israel was to remain therefore as God's possession always. This charge may be put simply as this: "Be my people: for I am your God." This was the very centre of the covenant relation. Holy or Holiness therefore, on the part of Israel meant devoted to God, or dedicated to God, Yahweh. On the part of God, it meant divinity. By nature God is holy, he

is divine.

(c) W. J. P. - Sanctify: When Yahweh said he would sanctify himself, it does not mean that he was unholy. By this expression, Yahweh was expressing his wish to glorify himself by showing his divine greatness among Israel and nations (Ezek. 38:16; Lev. 10:3; Psa. 99:3). When Moses failed to sanctify Yahweh, that is, to glorify him, before the congregation of Israel he was chastised, and this denied him the opportunity to enter the promised land (Num. 20:10-12). His offence was that he did not allow the divine holiness, i.e., the power and greatness of Yahweh to be seen directly, rather it was his own personality that he impressed upon the people.

In summary therefore, one may conclude thus:

1. Things and persons dedicated or devoted to Yahweh are holy. They therefore express their relationship to God. They are set apart for him. God only is the Holy One. According to Hosea 11:9, 12, He is the Holy One in the midst of Israel. This designation shows clearly that God is separated from man and elevated above him, just as the

dedicated thing or person is separated from the common. Men or things, no matter how holy, are in secondary position to God.

In Isaiah and the prophets, for instance, the word "Holy" becomes Yahweh's name. Isaiah 6:3, says: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." This is God's divine majesty or his Godhead. No person or thing, however dedicated, devoted or separated could attain such a divine status.

2. When men are devoted to him, they must share his character and be morally upright. This is what makes them peculiar and the general expression of their holiness. As to things, they must be fit to be Yahweh's. They must be the best and ceremonially pure. Only clean things by their nature could be dedicated to Yahweh, just as only men of a character like his own could be dedicated to him. For instance, in Exodus 32:26, 29, the Levites declared themselves on Yahweh's side and they were separated for him and his service.

3. Holiness is an attribute of God. It expresses God's transcendency, his majesty, power and wisdom. Man in

his covenant relation to Yanweh must acknowledge these fundamental bases, without which no perfect understanding of the covenant relation would be well appreciated.

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## 5 NOTES TO CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

- 1 My aim finds base in the premise of W.A. Brown, who claimed that Theology, like Philosophy cannot create, it can only interpret. Therefore, the religion of the Israelities is to be explained meaningfully, in theological perspective. (See W.A. Brown, "The Old Theology and the New", The Harvard Theological Review, IV., p.23).
- 2 Begrich, "Berith", ZAW; cited by E. Jacob, Theology of the Old Testament, p. 211. See also G. Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, I, p.129; Joshua 9:6ff., I Kgs. 22:34; I Sam. II: Iff.

## DEFINITION AND ETYMOLOGY OF COVENANT

- 3 E. Schmidt, Bi; cited by H.W. Robinson, The Religious ideas of Old Testament, p. 188.
- 4(a) Commandments: מצוות, from the singular: מצוה. The word "commandments" when used in the Old Testament usually refers to the ten commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai, otherwise referred to as the Decalogue. It may also be termed "the law of Moses".

But when חוקה is used, this means the Pentateuch. This at times embraces both the statutes and the ordinances. It may then be properly referred to as "The book of the Law".

(b) The Statutes: חוקים: from the singular חוק: Statutes are the rules and instructions concerning the social life of Israel, including the relationship between the same Israelites, and their relationship to non-Israelites.

(c) The Ordinances: חוקים: from the singular חוק (ordinance). The ordinances are the decrees, rules, or religious rites regarding the Old Testament cultus, regulating the religious worship and ceremonies, e.g., the Passover, the feast of the Tabernacle, first fruits, sacrifices and offerings. In the New Testament, they apply to Baptism, Eucharist and the Holy Orders. They also include the priesthood office in general.

Ordinances and Statutes always go together inter-relatedly, e.g., Exodus 15:25; and Joshua 24:25. In I Kings 2:3, the three terms, commandments, statutes and ordinances, are mentioned together. In addition to these three words, עדות: testimonies, is also mentioned. This simply refers to the two stones of the ten commandments kept in the "Ark of the LORD", otherwise called the "Ark of the Covenant", or the "Ark of Testimony"; which was placed on the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle or temple. Incidentally, both the Akkadian and



Aramaic words for testimony were alternatively used for covenant, originally meaning "Obligation sworn to".

5. E. Jacob, op.cit., p. 211.

#### COVENANT IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

6. G.E. Mendenhall, "Covenant", NEB, V., p. 226.
7. G.E. Mendenhall, Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East, p. 32. Henceforth cited as Law and Covenant. (as quoted by Korosec).
8. G.E. Mendenhall, "Covenant", NEB, V. p. 227.
9. G.E. Mendenhall, Law and Covenant, p. 35.
10. G. Fohrer, "History of Israelite Religion" Theology, LXXVI., No. 641, p. 601.
11. This was a reflection upon Isaiah's foreign policy. That he contrasted Micah who said that Jerusalem will fall, should not be taken as a contradiction. Israel as a holy, "Separated", or "Set apart" nation should refrain from foreign alliance. The nation must not entangle herself with foreign politics. Yet when the foe was at hand the chosen people must fight in faith. The covenant God, on his part, "would intervene".

## CHAPTER II

## COVENANT FORMS IN ISRAEL

If the contents and narratives of the Old Testament covenants are critically examined, these may be conveniently classified under three major divisions. First, the secular traditions, with the following forms: Suzerainty, Parity, Patron and Promissory. Second, the God-bound covenants, namely: the Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, and Davidic covenants. Third, the Israel-bound covenants. These are: the Mosaic covenant, the covenant of Joshua, and the Deuteronomic reform, otherwise called, the reform of Josiah. The Covenant of Ezra is also an Israel-bound covenant.

## 1. THE SECULAR TRADITIONS

The Hittite treaties well illustrate that all treaties were normally concluded by appealing to the deities of both the Suzerain and Vassal states as witnesses. However, this is not true in all cases as regards the Israelite secular covenants. In the Old Testament secular traditions, Yahweh may not be a party or witness to the covenants. First to be considered under this type of covenants is the suzerainty treaty.

(A) Suzerainty Treaty.

The Hittite suzerainty treaties were highly developed forms of treaties and they can be taken as representing the basis for covenants in the whole of the Ancient Near East. In these treaties, the vassal states were put under the protection of the Hittite sovereign. The Suzerain stipulated the obligations which bound the inferior. Similarly, there are certain treaties that are typical illustrations of this form in the Old Testament.

In I Samuel 11:1, the Jabesh-gileadites offered to serve Nahash the Ammonite in a covenant relationship. They said: "Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you." Even though it was the inferior who initiated this covenant, it was to be ratified by the superior, without whose approval the covenant may not be established. When the superior stipulated the condition by which the treaty could be made, this was not acceptable to the inferior; hence, the consequent war between Nahash, the Ammonite, and Saul, the Israelite, on behalf of Jabesh-gilead ensued. Ezekiel 17:13 refers to the treaty between Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and Zedekiah, king of Judah, as mentioned in II Chronicles 36:13. Zedekiah was the royal seed, that is, king Jehoiachin's or Jeconiah's uncle. Jehoiachin himself had been taken as a prisoner of war to Babylon (II Kgs. 24:

10ff.). The chief men of the land were also taken away to Babylon as hostages for the fulfilment of the treaty between Nebuchadnezzar and Zedekiah. But later, Zedekiah committed treason. He was also captured and taken to Babylon (II Kgs. 24:20-25:7).

Though suzerainty treaties bound only the inferior party, the superior also gave up some degree of freedom of action, which he could have normally exercised without a **treaty**. The **treaty** relationship was not based on force alone. Once the **treaty** had been established he could no longer exercise his superior power arbitrarily; rather, he was to defend the vassal on all matters. This was the commitment underlying Joshua's defence of the Gibeonites at Gilgal against the Adonizedek alliance. (Here, it is obvious that Yahweh was not a party or witness to the Joshua-Gibeon treaty) (Jos. 9:14-15). In accordance with the nature of God, he declares in Genesis 12:3, that he would defend Israel throughout. He would be severe against the enemies of Abram (Abraham). God promised Joshua in the renewal of the "Mosaic covenant" with him, that he would be with him, and not fail him or forsake him (Jos. 1:5).

(B) The Parity Treaty

The Parity covenants may be sub-divided into two categories, namely, those in which specific obligations were imposed and the others in which no obligations were imposed except that of preserving the peace between the two parties. First, let us consider the latter.

The treaty between Jacob and Laban in Genesis 31:44-50, presupposed that Jacob would take care of Laban's daughters and keep the peace between them. So also, the covenant between Abraham and Abimelech in Genesis 21:25-32, is another example of a parity covenant which is to preserve peace between the two parties. In the above two examples both parties were bound by oath.

In Genesis 26:27-31, Isaac made a parity treaty with Abimelech in which there is no indication of further obligations imposed other than to retain the peace between them.

Second, the treaty between Joshua and the Gibeonites was a parity peace treaty, but when the diplomacy of the Gibeonites was detected, Joshua changed the treaty from parity to suzerainty, and the Gibeonites willingly consented to this. The covenant between David and Jonathan was

initiated by Jonathan who is believed to be superior in social status (although Jonathan was conscious of the divine choice of David to be superior to him in the political arena). However, in this covenant, there were no stipulations, and no oath was taken as such. It was only established on sincere love and friendship. What can be regarded as "witnesses" to the covenant were the robe, armour, sword, bow and girdle of Jonathan given to David. There is no indication here, that only one party was bound by this covenant. It will therefore be most appropriate to suppose that this was a parity covenant. The present or future social status of either party therefore became irrelevant.

According to II Samuel 3:12-21, David made a covenant with Abner. Both of them had obligations to fulfil in order to make the covenant viable. While Abner promised to bring all Israel to David, David also committed himself that as long as Michal his former wife, was restored to him he too would be obliged to make a covenant with Abner, and consequently to reign over the whole of Israel. This covenant was a two-sided bargain and as such, it is a parity covenant.

The treaty between Asa, king of Judah, and Ben-hadad, king of Syria, did not indicate a suzerainty treaty. Though it was initiated by Asa who was seeking alliance with the king of Syria for security, and sent gifts to him, yet Ben-hadad had to break the existing treaty with Baasha, king of Israel, in order to honour the present mutual agreement between him and Asa. In all probability this was a parity treaty.

#### (C) The Patron Treaty

Patron treaty is a **treaty** in which the superior binds himself to some obligations in favour of the inferior. There is little or no evidence of this type of covenant in the Old Testament, other than those in which Yahweh bound himself. We shall discuss such covenants very shortly under the "God-bound covenants."

#### (D) The Promissory Treaty

The Promissory type of **treaty** is extremely important both in the secular and religious traditions; hence it is otherwise called "the Royal grand type" of **treaty**. A promissory **treaty** is not primarily intended to establish

a new relationship between two parties, but to guarantee future loyalty to the stipulated obligations. It can be said that, there is only one party to this type of covenant. It is usually viewed as a "promissory oath" which is unconditional. This makes the element of promissory oath in other treaties different from the Royal grand treaty.

In Jeremiah 34:8-11, Zedekiah made a covenant with his people and proclaimed the release of all Hebrew slaves unconditionally, simply because it was not the custom of the Israelites to enslave their fellow citizens. Similarly, in II Kings 23:3, both king Josiah and his people made a covenant before Yahweh to keep the commandments, testimonies and statutes contained in the book of the covenant which had been found in the house of the LORD. During the post-exilic reform of Nehemiah and Ezra, the Judeans bound themselves by a curse and oath to obey the laws of the Pentateuch. They promised to put away foreign wives, and also to refrain from usury (Neh. 10:28-29; 5:11-13; Ezra 10:3). All the above one-party covenants were not the making of new relationship, but rather the renewal of the old covenant relation; that is, the promise to re-establish the old or the already existing covenant. They were all meant for both the social, political and religious stability



of the new community in order to avoid future calamity (Neh. 9:38).

## 2. GOD-BOUND COVENANTS

### (A) The Adamic Covenant

When God created the heaven and the earth, he saw that his creation was good, and he ceased to create. This was a total and perfect display of his nature, and he reposed in satisfaction. According to A. B. Davidson, "this repose and satisfaction express his relation to the creation, and on this condition he made the sabbath the symbol of his covenant with his creation."<sup>1</sup>

According to Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 17:12, "He, [God] established with them [men of his creation] an eternal covenant, and showed them his judgments." Furthermore, the Adamic covenant was made of works with Adam, as the representative of the whole human race. Truly, in the JE account of the creation (Gen. 2:4<sup>b</sup>-25), it was mandatory for Adam to obey the stipulations of the covenant. Similarly, in the JE story of the Fall and the Expulsion from Eden,

in Genesis 3, it was mandatory for Adam to work for sustenance.

In all the above passages, Adam did not swear to any oath or obligation, rather, it was God who bound himself in the Priestly writer's account of the Creation (Gen. 1:1-2:4<sup>e</sup>), to bless Adam and the whole mankind. The condition of obedience was not attached in this Priestly account. When the two different accounts of the creation are put together as in Genesis 1-2, it is commonly presumed that while God bound himself by promising life eternal to mankind, the covenant was upon the condition of obedience, with death as penalty of transgression. While this view is correct, yet it is clearly obvious that it is a one-party covenant in the sense that it was only God who bound himself to some obligation.

#### (B) The Noanic Covenant

God the creator and governor of his creation made another covenant with the new race that survived the flood. It was directed to the human race as a family. Genesis 9: 4f., gives the conditions of the covenant: the new race

should abstain from eating blood; they should cherish the sacredness of human life by refraining from shedding their own blood (suicide), and the blood of their neighbours (murder). The sign was the light in the heavens appearing on the face of the cloud. In Genesis 9:12-13, Yahweh established the sign of the covenant by setting a bow in the cloud, for Noah and for all future generations. It was a symbol of the new light of God's face and of life shining on the dark background of the watery firmament.

In Genesis 9:11, God bound himself to obligations never again to cut off all flesh and destroy the earth by the waters of a flood. It is also appropriate to add, that, it is implied according to Genesis 8:22, that another sign of the covenant was that, the recurrence of the seasons and of day and night should not cease. This is attested by Jeremiah 33:20.

### (C) The Abrahamic Covenant

Probably the most original of the God-bound covenants was the Abrahamic covenant, which is preserved for us in two forms, the Yahwist form J in Genesis 15; and the Priestly tradition P in Genesis 17:1-14. In these forms,

Yahweh is re-establishing his covenant with Abraham in response to Abraham's request for certainty of the promise which Yahweh had earlier on made (Gen. 12:2-3). For the following reasons, this covenant tradition is of immense historical importance, if taken as the model for the later covenant traditions, such as the Mosaic and Davidic:

First, the covenant was established by means of cutting the sacrificial animals provided (Gen. 15:9-10), into two parts. This was a very archaic form of pre-Mosaic tradition. Second, from the Hittite treaty tradition (a pre-Mosaic period), it was a usual practice for the head of the family to make a covenant with a particular deity. This was, therefore, one of the important elements in the pre-Mosaic heritage of ancient Israel.

In these J and P forms, Abraham did not swear to any obligation; rather it was Yahweh who in all cases swore the oath to create out of Abraham a great nation, defend him at all costs, and give to his generations the promised land.

Genesis 12:2-3, says:

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.

Also, in Genesis 15:5, the LORD says:

Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them. Then he said to him, "so shall your descendants be".

Again, the Abrahamic covenant should be seen as an unconditional bestowal of salvation by Yahweh to Abraham and his generation (Gen. 17:2,7,19,21). This is otherwise referred to as an election covenant. In Genesis 17, the rite of circumcision is given as a "sign" or "seal" to appropriate the divine offer of salvation in confessional form. Both Abraham and his descendants were to perform this rite. This vividly expresses the original intention of the covenant to make the patriarchs a specific part of the Abrahamic covenant. Genesis 17:11-14, says, among other things:

You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised; every male throughout your generations.

From all available records in the Old Testament, it is a plain fact that the patriarchs, that is, the twelve sons of Jacob, were the descendants of Abraham. Therefore, it is appropriate to infer that the patriarchs were still within the provisions of the covenant with their still ancestor, Abraham. In this account, Abraham did not swear to any obligation. The covenant with Abraham and David, otherwise known as the Royal Grand is of promissory type modelled on Ancient Near Eastern types. But they included an element of obligation. So also an element of promise is implied in the Mosaic Covenant, though of obligatory type.

The passages above show very clearly that the Abrahamic covenant contained three promises, namely, that Abraham would become a people or a great nation; that he attained a new and special relationship to God; and that he was to possess a land (Canaan), a sign of a completed redemption and salvation. Thus, the covenant made with Abraham was of grace. It was a development over the

Noahic covenant. It passed from the wide area of creation and natural life. The conditions of the covenant were the above promises, while circumcision, the sign of the covenant, was the symbol of putting off the natural life and the putting on of a new spiritual life.

(D) The Davidic Covenant

The Davidic covenant is a subsequent and most important covenant in which Yahweh bound himself. In II Samuel 3:9, Abner attested that it was Yahweh himself who swore to David. David himself also attested, in II Samuel 23:5, that Yahweh had made an everlasting covenant with him.

דָּוִד is used to express the divine promise to establish a dynasty for David according to prophet Nathan's oracle in II Samuel 7:5-16. Israel was the chosen nation of Yahweh and David's dynasty would last forever. While we maintain the continuous demonstration of God's love and grace towards his people, it was David's devotion to Yahweh that earned him the promise of eternal grace. This simply means that God saw in David, a person suitable to effect the fulfilment of

his covenant. The LORD appreciated all the moves of David to provide him an abode (II Sam. 7:2). As a token of gratitude, God promised to build "a house", that is, a dynasty for David (II Sam. 7:4-16).

In Psalms 132:2-5, we find David making an oath to the LORD not to rest until he found a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob. Again, the LORD here swore to establish the throne of David forever. Thus God bound himself in a covenant with his servant who proved his loyalty and devotion to his master and Lord. In Psalms 89:3, 28-29; 110:4, it is also stated, that it was Yahweh who swore to establish David and his descendants forever. In the above covenant, Yahweh alone was bound to a promise. The kingship now shared in the solidarity of the Mosaic covenant.

The covenant with David is similar to the Abrahamic covenant. While God made a pledge to establish David's Dynasty forever, he made an oath with Abraham to give his children the land of Canaan everlastingly. These two covenants were quite different from the Mosaic covenant, in which Israel pledged loyalty to God, and is an obligatory type, while the former two are a promissory



type. The unconditionality of the Davidic covenant is as pronounced as the Abrahamic covenant (II Sam. 7:13-15). By this token, the treaty with the patriarchs is considered as valid forever. When, on the part of Israel, the covenant was breached, she would be punished severely. But God would intervene to restore Israel to himself, because he would not break his covenant.

The dynasty of David succeeded convincingly in Judah (as against the chaotic dynasties in Israel, the Northern Kingdom), through which Yahweh was going to fulfil his promise to Abraham. The intention of this covenant may be to establish a stable state and dynasty void of constant revolution and struggle for succession at the death of each king. Thus God made a covenant with David and bound himself to sustain it at all costs, thereby fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant in progress. According to G. E. Mendenhall, "In David, the promise to the Patriarchs is fulfilled, and renewed."<sup>2</sup>

In the prophetic books, the covenant was bound up with the prophetic-messianic expectation of the Davidic shoot (Isa. 11:1, 10; Jer. 23:5; Ezek. 34:23-24). The Messianic concept of the above passages should not surprise us, because,

as Mendenhall States, "The belief in the king - saviour who will appear in the future and bring bliss to the nation was prevalent in the Ancient Near East"<sup>3</sup>. The application of the term "Davidic shoot", to the Davidic covenant was to establish the continuity of his dynasty forever.

The unconditionality of this covenant was most probably similar to such unconditional covenant found in their environment. This covenant was certainly a reshaping of the Older Covenant, i.e., the Abrahamic treaty. The editor looked at the accomplishment of David as the fulfilment of the promise given to Abraham. That is to say, when God was directly dealing with Abraham, he did not specify the exact boundaries of Canaan to be inherited by Abraham and his descendants, but simply, he would be given the land (Gen. 12: 1,7; 15:7ff.; 17:8), as a possession for ever.

Thus it may be concluded that the Adamic covenant was given the symbol of the Sabbath and the grace of eternal life. The Noahic covenant expresses the sacredness of life, and of the consciousness of man as belonging to God. The Abrahamic covenant was of grace, and of spiritual life. The Davidic covenant was subsequent to the previous ones which were now being re-established by promising an everlasting dynasty to the devoted king.

In all the above covenants, it was God who bound himself to his creation and mankind, and especially, Israel, his elect. The next section deals with the Israel-bound covenants. First, it is necessary to discuss the Mosaic or Sinaic covenant which was the climax of the Yahweh-Israel covenant relationship, in which Yahweh was recognised as the moral and spiritual God and father of a moral and redeemed people, Israel.

### 3. ISRAEL-BOUND COVENANTS

In contrast to the God-bound covenants discussed above, there are other covenants which are directly opposite and could be termed, "Israel-bound covenants." There are four such covenants, namely: the Mosaic Covenant, the Covenant of Joshua, the Deuteronomic reform, and the Covenant of Ezra. They are all identified with the Decalogue. We shall consider the first two in this section, while the other two will be discussed in chapter five.

#### (A) The Mosaic Covenant

The faith that the choice of Israel by Yahweh was a genuine one, made the Israelites to consider Yahweh as their tribal God, and his religion as a tribal religion. This concept also yielded particularism in that the Israelites restricted both Yahweh and his religion to themselves.

Israel was a religious community by the means of their covenant relation with Yahweh, conclusively formed at Sinai under the leadership of Moses. The Mosaic covenant came as the culmination in which the relationship between Yahweh and Israel was formalized. It is to be said, therefore,

that the Sinai covenant was a formal ratification and ceremonial establishment of any early covenants made between the Patriarchs and God. Henceforth, God's covenant with Israel was as steadfast as the laws of nature (Jer. 33:20-21).

When the ethical prophets, such as Amos, Hosea, and Jeremiah examined the conditions of the covenant, they realized that the covenant was basically theological, conveying religious truth to the entire world through the chosen nation, though it also includes the social, economic and political organization of the people. Here, the political and religious history of Israel is inseparable. Every life experience of the Israelites was given a religious interpretation within the covenant provision. Covenant thereby became the foundation or symbolic base of the community. Every action, religious or otherwise, must be in conformity with the stipulations and law of the covenant. When the ethical prophets condemned the people, it was to reshape their life-behaviours which were contrary to the terms of the covenant.<sup>4</sup> The prophets believed that the Sinai covenant was the era of Israel's birth as a religious nation. It was then that

Yahweh created her, according to Isaiah 40, and became her father. God, by nature, is moral and spiritual. He created the rational and moral creature with whom he entered into a covenant to be a spiritual creature, able to enter into close relations with him. Israel must therefore be entirely submissive to God.

To establish the Mosaic covenant, according to Exodus 24:7-9, the "blood of the covenant", that is, the blood of the victim, was sprinkled partly on the altar and partly on the people. The conditions of the covenant were clearly stated also by the book of the covenant, by which Israel was bound to remain a faithful party to the covenant, thereby becoming God's own people par-excellence.

If the covenant traditions associated with Moses are compared with the international treaty forms, especially those of the Hittites, the similarities between them are very striking. This however, does not mean that the Mosaic covenant forms were basically an imitation of such secular treaty forms. The following similarities were found in many of the covenant forms of early Israel.

### 1. The Preamble:

In the Decalogue, Yahweh is identified as the covenant giver. This is contained in Exodus 20:1-2<sup>a</sup>. Here, the preamble is simply reduced to "I am the LORD your God." This introduces Yahweh as the Suzerain who wished to go into a covenant relation with his people. It was he who initiated the covenant and established it. Like the Hittite treaty. Yahweh is the overlord politically and religiously.

### 2. The Historical Prologue:

The second feature of the Mosaic covenant, that is, the historical prologue, is as brief as the preamble. Yahweh is here presented as the God who delivered the people from the bondage in Egypt. This is contained in the words "who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." Grammatically, it is obvious here, that in the Mosaic tradition, both the preamble and the historical prologue are inseparable, contrary to the Hittite form. The importance of this is that the revelation of Yahweh is a component part of the historical events which were the foundation of the covenant itself, and the obligations attached to it.

### 3. The Stipulations

The deliverance of Israel was a free and voluntary act of the saving God. Obligations were thereby stipulated for the people if they wanted to retain a lasting relationship to that God. This common and unique relationship made the community a special people and property of a single sovereign God.

The Sinai covenant can be described as the new "Genesis"; that is, it marked the beginnings of nearly all the various theological themes which were later developed in the religious life-history of Israel. Among such are: the Providence, or Grace of God; the Kingdom of God; the sin of man and the wrath and judgment of God; the holy people as God's community; the rewards of obedience and punishment of disobedience; and ethical norms to make God's people purer than the universal idolatrous life. Some of these theological issues will be examined in chapter four of this thesis.

Like the Mesopotamian stipulations, the stipulations of the Sinaic covenant took the forms of case and "apodictic" law. They formed the basis for the above "Genesis", and can be summed up thus:

First, Israel should have no other gods, but only

Yahweh. The elect people should refrain from any religious or social functions that were associated with these various deities. The superiority of Yahweh and the observance of his commands should always be upheld.

Second, God's name should not be taken in vain. This emphasizes the sanctity of oaths which should be maintained. Third, the Sabbath, that is, the seventh day, was to be strictly observed as a holy day. This was similar to the Roman custom in the first century B.C.;<sup>5</sup> farmers, work-animals and slaves were permitted to rest every eighth day. This is precisely the interpretation given to Deuteronomy 5:14:

But the seventh day is a sabbath  
 to the LORD your God; in it you  
 shall not do any work, you, or  
 your son, or your daughter, or  
 your manservant, or your maid-  
 servant, or your ox, or your ass,  
 or any of your cattle, or the  
 sojourner who is within your gates,  
 that your manservant and your  
 maidservant may rest as well as  
 you.

Fourth, parents were to be honoured and treated with



due respect. It was particularly necessary to give such a command in a time of upheaval. Fifth, killing of persons by persons, even by accident if it involved negligence, was considered as a usurpation of the divine sovereignty over life. This was of course different from execution of persons condemned for crime, or killing of the enemy in warfare. In this situation it was believed that human beings were acting as agents of Yahweh or some deity. Furthermore, under such divine command, persons and properties otherwise referred to as "spoil" or "booty", were considered as burnt offering to God, who was actually prosecuting the war.

And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the LORD for destruction. (Josh. 6:17)

And when you have taken the city, you shall set the city on fire, doing as the LORD has bidden.

(Josh. 8:8)

The above practice was entirely a religious principle. It had nothing to do with immorality or wickedness. Similarly, when officials or agents of the state government

carried out such a duty, they could **not** be held guilty of murder, since they were representing the constitutionally established authority.

Sixth, other commandments were made against theft, adultery and false witness, for the security of property and **family relationships**, and for true **lineal** succession, **integrity**, and **justice** in the society. **Seventh**, in **conclusion**, **coveting** was prohibited. The fundamental human rights **should** always be respected. One's neighbour's possessions in all respects should not be tampered with, in order to have a healthy and holy society. Most of these commandments, if not all, are ethically based. They show that **neither** socially organized force, nor the political power structure like the ancient idolatrous states, could make Israel or any society ideal. The divine orders must be kept as ethical obligations for the well-being of the community in general.

#### 4. The Deposit and public reading

Like the Hittite treaty forms, there **was** a provision made for the deposit of the Mosaic covenant document in the sanctuary. This was placed in the "Ark of the Covenant"

which resided in the Holy of Holies. Like the ancient world, it was placed in the sanctuary of the vassal, and a requirement was made to read it publicly at stipulated intervals of the year.

We are told in Deuteronomy 31:26, that the Decalogue was to be deposited in the sacred Ark. If the Ark had contained the two tablets of the law, why then should it be kept in the darkness of the sanctuary as a hidden mystery? The law was supposed to be the companion of the Israelites. Moreover, it was the high priest who entered into the Holy of Holies, where the Ark was kept, but only once a year on the day of Atonement. If it is true that the Ark contained the tablets of the law, which was most probably so, their presence therein must have served a different purpose.

In Exodus 20 and 34, we have two accounts of the Decalogue which are quite different. It is obvious from this situation that it was not certain which of the two laws was actually written on the stones or tables, taking for granted that the Ark contained the stones. But according to Deuteronomy 31:26, the book of the law in the Ark was to serve as witness against the people. It may

therefore be supposed further that nothing was written on the tables, but they were simply to serve as witness.

In Deuteronomy 31:10f., *Moses* enjoined the people to read the book of law before the assembly of all Israel at the end of every seven years, at the set time of the year of release, at the feast of booths. Since this account had undergone Deuteronomic revision and had been subjected to interpolation, this assumption may therefore not be reliable. But one thing is certain, that in whatever form the book of the law was preserved and read, the periodic reading of the book of the covenant cannot be denied. This is well illustrated by the book of the law given to Joshua; and the discovered book of the law by king Josiah, which we shall discuss very shortly.

When God handed over the "Book of the Law" to Joshua, the same procedure was implied (Josh. 1:8). This is supposed to have influenced the covenant at Shechem, according to Joshua 24. The purpose of Joshua 1:8, is almost self-explanatory. Apart from being a documentary authority to guide the new leader, Joshua, in his new duties, it was also to familiarize the entire people of Israel with the obligations attached to the covenant-relation with Yahweh, their

"Suzerain". This will enable the new generation to retain the age-long fellowship and covenant relationship. Also, since the sacred document was always kept in the holy sanctuary, it follows that this practice was to indicate the loyalty of the deity to the obligations of the covenant; that is, he would not aid in breach of the covenant. The "vassal state", Israel, should in like manner constantly respect and keep the provisions of the covenant.

##### 5. The List of Witnesses

In the usual legal contracts, witnesses are called to participate in the establishment of such agreements.

Similarly, in the Hittite treaties, a number of witnesses were called to effect the conclusion of such treaties.

Among such witnesses were both the Suzerain's gods and those of the vassal states. This means that the gods of the two parties participated in establishing and enforcing the treaties.

However, unlike the Hittite or Ancient Near East treaties, this type of provision cannot be referred to in the Yahweh-Israel covenant-making. This was so because

Yahweh was the only God of the people. The Israelites, as the "vassal", had no other gods and as such they could not be called upon to present their gods or "pantheon", to bear witness to any covenant. A close look on Exodus 20 will substantiate this claim. But in Joshua 24, the people themselves were referred to as witnesses against themselves. So also, in Joshua 24:27, the great stone which was set up under the oak in the sanctuary of the LORD was declared as "a witness against us"; that is, a testimony against themselves.

In Deuteronomy 32:1, Moses here called upon the natural phenomena as his witnesses, "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and let earth hear the words of my mouth." In this quotation, however, the situation was unequivocally quite different. It was more or less the act of giving a charge by the leader to his subjects. It was not a covenant-making between him and Israel, or between him and Yahweh. Rather, the witnesses were called upon to see that Moses performed his divine duty effectively. This same idea is found in Isaiah 1:2; the heavens were to bear witness to prophet Isaiah's effective ministry in assessing the state of

spiritual bankruptcy of Judah, and his call for repentance and religious meaningfulness.

In no way should one infer that both Moses and Isaiah were ~~suggesting~~ animism. The features of the natural world such as mountains, rivers, springs, the great Sea, heaven and earth, and winds and clouds, implied in the above passages, should all be seen as the handiwork of Yahweh. Therefore, it was another way of calling upon the God of the people to bear witness against the people for their unbelief and religious bankruptcy or wanton religiosity.

#### 6. The Blessings and Curses

In order to effect the continued loyalty of the vassals to the treaty-obligations, a formula for blessings and curses was designed in the Hittite treaty to be administered as situations called for. In case of breach, the Hittite king would proceed against the vassal with military forces, in this case, acting as the agent, by which the divine curse was brought down upon the erring vassal.<sup>6</sup> But as long as the vassal state kept the provisions of the treaty, it would continue to enjoy the blessings, especially the security, of the Suzerain. This formula has to be seen as

the exclusive action of the gods of both parties, since the deities of the vassal would not be party to the vassal's breach of the **treaty**, . they would also agree with the Suzerain gods in meting out judgments upon the erring vassal, or vice-versa.

This formula is reflected in Exodus 20, though it is not as explicit as that of the Hittites. But in Deuteronomy 26-28, the formula is more explicit. The word "curse" does not appear in Exodus 20, but the substance is there in the description of Yahweh as a jealous God who punishes the sons, or visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, to the third and the fourth generation of those who "breach his covenant". However, in Exodus 24, which continues the Mosaic-covenant ceremonies, the curse is implied in the ritual sprinkling with the blood of the covenant. This idea is in accordance with the Hittite formula, according to Mendenhall,<sup>7</sup> in order to conclude a covenant, rather than adopting a "puppy and lettuce" form, that is, a kind of "communal meal" ceremony, a young donkey was cut into two halves, and the two parties concerned would enter, thereby physically entering into the covenant. At the same time they identified themselves with the



slaughtered animal. That is to say, that just as the head of the donkey was cut off, so may the gods, already invited as witnesses to the covenant, do to any erring party. In this case, the vassal was primarily involved.

In Exodus 24:6, Moses poured some of the blood of the oxen slaughtered for the peace and burnt offerings on the altar, representing the physical presence of Yahweh. And in verse 8, of the same chapter, Moses threw the other part of the blood (which was put in basins) upon the people, and declared, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." It follows therefore that to breach the covenant provision, was to suffer the calamity suffered by the oxen slaughtered. But, to obey the provisions of the covenant, according to verse 7, was to enjoy all the blessings that went along with the covenant.

#### 7. The Oaths

There is no clear indication of oath taking in Exodus 20:18-19; shortly after Moses had given the Decalogue, The obligations of the Sinaiic covenant were merely stated, But in Exodus 24, when Yahweh offered the covenant, the people

agreed informally in verse 3, "All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do." This oath-like promise helped Moses to conclude the covenant formally. He wrote the covenant law, set the covenant altar, and offered the covenant sacrifices. Following these, he read the written "book of the covenant" to the people, and in verse 7, the formal oath was taken, thereby enabling Moses to conclude the covenant between Yahweh and Israel.

It is clear here that there was no FORMAL obligation on Yahweh's part, just as the Hittite king did not swear to perform anything in the treaty with the vassal. However, the good will of the Suzerain was IMPLICITLY implied as long as the vassal behaved well. In the treaty between Yahweh and Israel, the good will of Yahweh was similarly demonstrated all along in the historical experiences of the people. In the Mosaic covenant, this benevolence of Yahweh was IMPLICITLY shown as well, but Yahweh did not swear anything which would EXPLICITLY bind him. The covenant was mutual in the sense that these are two distinct parties who had a certain freedom and initiative in concluding it. Israel on their part took oaths voluntarily and bound themselves to the obligations of the

Sinaic-covenant; hence the covenant is commonly referred to as the "Israel-bound covenant".

In conclusion, it is necessary to mention that by the Sinaic covenant, Israel emerged as a community founded on a covenant relationship, thereby appearing as a dependent vassal-state under the protection and mercy of the Suzerain, Yahweh. Furthermore, Yahweh was conceived as the king of kings, the God whose sovereignty had no equal. In addition, he was seen as a powerful "God of war". These characteristics of Yahweh had of course been viewed right from the "call of Israel" in Egypt and lingered on throughout the entire history of the Israelites, until they finally settled in the promised land. The presence of Yahweh and his people then became a threat to the strong, wicked and idolatrous Suzerains around them. The uniqueness and supremacy of Yahweh was therefore a contrast to the various idolatrous deities and their people.

The Mosaic covenant should also be seen as a development of religious awareness on the part of the people. By this, religious values and moral obligations were placed above political and economic interests. This was true of both the Hittite and other Ancient Near East communities,

and principally, the historical experience of Israel.

(B) The Covenant of Joshua

The covenant of Joshua is otherwise referred to as "the Shechem covenant".

Before the arrival and stay of Israel in Shechem, it is believed that the Canaanites there had established an important covenant tradition. The name of its god was Baal-berith, LORD of the covenant (Judg. 9:4). The Shechemites would most probably have had a local social structure based on covenant.<sup>8</sup> Hence Israel who had been influenced by this early developed covenant was called upon by Joshua to choose between Yahweh and the cults of the Amorites (Josh. 24)<sup>9</sup>

From the Sinaitic covenant to the eventual settlement of Israel in Canaan, they were to remain religiously loyal to Yahweh alone all the time; hence the covenant of Joshua which was principally to make Israel loyal to Yahweh, has been described as depicting almost all the features of the Mosaic covenant in an abridged form in the covenant narrative of Joshua 24 at Shechem.<sup>10</sup> Although this is true,

yet the Shechemite covenant should be considered as an independent narrative; for instance, Yahweh spoke in the first person as the author of the covenant in the prologue, but as we come to the stipulations, it was Joshua who spoke. What justifiable excuse could one attribute to this? Could it be that the original obligations were missing, and the editor had to make provision for that? Or, could it be that Joshua was still in order here as a worthy representative of Yahweh, even though this was not the pattern in the Mosaic tradition? In any case, whatever our feelings about the stipulations might be, the people voluntarily and unanimously gave their consent (oath) to abide by the conditions, and a great stone was set up under the oak in the sanctuary of the LORD as witness to the covenant.

Joshua 24:22, shows that apart from the great stone, the people also were witnesses to themselves in the covenant, thereby binding themselves to the stipulated obligations, namely: to put away other gods and serve Yahweh only. This of course was the foundation of other obligations. In this narrative, it will be observed that both the blessings and the cursings, as found in Deuteronomy 27, are missing.

G. E. Mendenhall has suggested that the curses in Deuteronomy 27 would fill in the gap of Joshua 24 beautifully.<sup>11</sup> It is interesting, however, to note that this covenant narrative preserves some historical connection of presenting all the tribes of Israel as a people of God in Shechem, and this was the very centre of the Sinaiic covenant.

The Shechemite covenant may be seen therefore as the covenant-renewal between Yahweh and Israel, not only to make Israel loyal to Yahweh as such, but to involve the new generations after the Sinaiic covenant. This covenant may also be seen from a political point of view, that of a full gathering of the tribes of Israel (and other ethnic groups) at Shechem because a renewal of the covenant sealed the conquest and the final apportioning of the land. It also seems to indicate the conversion to the worship of Yahweh of those Hebrews who did not go down in Egypt. In addition to the above, it was necessary to involve the non-Jews who had since come into the Jewish community right from the wilderness sojournings. Thus Israel was once again bound to the obligations of the Yahweh-Israel covenant relationship.

To conclude this section, I want to quote extensively the conclusion of G. E. Mendenhall on the covenant of Joshua:

It is very difficult to escape the conclusion that this narrative [i.e. Josh. 24] rests upon traditions which go back to the period when the treaty form was still living, but that the later writer used the materials of the tradition which were of importance and value to him, and adopted them to his own contemporary situation. The formation of the covenant in Palestine is itself precisely what we should expect. The traditions are insistent upon the fact that there was a discontinuity between the generation of Moses and that of Joshua - only Joshua himself and Caleb survived the wilderness period. There was furthermore not only a new generation, but, the amalgamation with groups already in Palestine. Consequently there was a new covenant formed - that which became the basis of the federation of tribes.<sup>12</sup>

The Next Chapter deals with the covenant statutes, instruments and sacred objects. This is to examine the physical phenomena of the Covenant worship, in order to know how the covenant was practically expressed by the Israellites in the religious atmosphere and the sacred officials and objects connected with the cultus.

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## 4. NOTES TO CHAPTER II

## GOD-BOUND COVENANTS

1. A.B. Davidson, The Theology of the Old Testament, (TOT), p. 248.
2. G.E. Mendenhall, "Covenant", IDB, I, p. 718.
3. G.E. Mendenhall, "Covenant", IDB, SV, p. 191.

## ISRAEL-BOUND COVENANTS

4. H.W. Robinson, RI, p. 187.
5. G.E. Mendenhall, Law and Covenant V, p. 228.
6. G.E. Mendenhall, Law and Covenant, 9. 38.
7. Ibid.
8. See H.G. May, "Joshua", Peake's Commentary on the Bible, p. 303. The name "El-berith" or "Baal-berith", means "El of the Covenant" or "Baal of the Covenant". This name presupposes that Schechem was associated with covenant-making by the Canaanites, before the Israelites settled there (Josh. 24:1; Judg. 9:4,46).
9. The covenant renewal in Joshua 24, provided a framework for Israelite worship, which was taken up in Subsequent centuries. The following pattern may be adduced from the text, traces of which are common to most liturgical forms in Churches today.
  1. Call to the people to present \_\_\_ themselves before Yahweh - Call to worship.
  2. Recitation of the Kerygma - Reading of Scripture and the singing of hymns or songs.
  3. Call to decision and response - Sermon, prayers, intercession and the Lord's prayer.
  4. Putting away of foreign gods - Decision and the Creed.

5. Covenant act and giving of Law - Holy Communion Service.
6. Closing admonition and dismissal - Benediction or Grace. See W. Harrelson, "Worship in Early Israel", Biblical Research, III, pp. 10f. See also, Cultus in Chapter IV of this thesis.
10. G.E. Mendenhall, Ibid., p. 41
11. Ibid.
12. G.E. Mendenhall, Law and Covenant, p. 41f.

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## CHAPTER III

## PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF THE COVENANT

## 1. THE STATUTES OF THE COVENANT

The leadership of Moses, as we all know, did not stop with the task of delivering the enslaved Hebrews from the Egyptian slavery. It was he who apart from welding them into a single people of Yahweh, also gave them the covenant law at Sinai. This was to re-order a fresh legal unifying community life solely in accordance with the divine covenant terms. In other words, it was the covenant that formed the basis for both the secular and the cultic law.

Israel was conscious of the fact that their national law was inseparable from the religious law, hence their community was regarded as theocratic, that is, a nation ruled entirely by God through the divine covenant law.

It was obvious that the Ten Commandments would require some supplement. Apart from the Decalogue in Exodus 20, the supplement runs through Exodus 23. This is usually referred to as "The Book of the Covenant". Also, the book of Deuteronomy forms another major work of law in the Pentateuch.

Undoubtedly, however, it is the product of the seventh century monarchical period. It shows the influence of the ethical prophets and the Mosaic law.

Much of the Israelite social law had similar feature with that of the Ancient Near East Common law. In its typical formulation, it was introduced by a conditional clause like that of Exodus 21:18ff., which says:

And if men strive together, and one smite another with a stone, or with his fist, and he die not, but keepeth his bed: If he rise again, . . . . .; then shall he that smote him be quit: . . . . . And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, and he die, . . .; he shall be surely punished.

(A.V.)

The type of legal formulation peculiar to Israel was that in which Yahweh addressed Israel as a unit community: "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not". This apodictic type of law was the characteristic law of the covenant relationship.

It is important to find out what the basic principle was that made the Israelite law more distinguished from those national laws of the Ancient Near East, such as the

Babylonian law of the time of King Hammurabi, C. 1,700 B.C., in the so called "code of Hammurabi", the Hittite laws of c. 1,300 B.C., and the ancient Assyrian laws of c.1,100 B.C. Yet there were some much earlier Babylonian laws before Hammurabi, namely the code of Urnammu c.2,080 or 2050 B.C.; the legal reforms of Eshnunna C.1925 or 1,850 B.C., otherwise called the Code of Bilalama; and Lipit-Ishtar code C. 1860 B.C.

The Law is very important in the Bible so that the first five books of Moses are called Torah, i.e., the Law. The God-Israel covenant was the covenant of Grace, but Grace could only be retained as a result of the obedience to the covenant Law. Therefore, law was the basis of the covenant between God and Israel; so that Law and Covenant went together. The future well-being of Israel depended upon the observance of the Law of the covenant. It included Legal, Moral and Cultic prescriptions, touching every aspect of human life. These are similar to the three forms of law of the Akkadian, namely: dīnu-legal; Kibsu-social; and Parsu-Religious injunctions.

C.C. Forman<sup>1</sup> examined the covenant Law, and divided it into the following three forms, namely: The ritual rules (religious); the Humanitarian prescriptions (social); and the civil laws (legal).

In his own investigation to the literary history of the Book of the Covenant, J. Morgenstern<sup>2</sup>, categorized the law into the following four forms:

1. D<sup>e</sup>barim. This type was expressed in direct form and "thou", in the address. It dealt with fundamental ritual principles (religious).
2. Mispatim. This took the form of conditional sentence "if", and was concerned with the civil matters (legal).
3. Huggim. This was concise and it used participle in the introductory clause of the Law, and employed the third singular imperfect, and was strengthened by the infinitive absolute. The penalty for such crime was death, e.g. "whoever kills will be killed".
4. Miswot. This was addressed in the second person singular. It was exemplified by explanatory statement, giving basis and justification for the law. It dealt purely with ethical matters. The penalty for this was "Disfavour of the Deity".

Albrecht Alt<sup>3</sup> studied the legal materials of the Old Testament and identified two types of law, namely:

**The Casuistic and the Apodictic laws.** They were both unique in the ancient world, that is, they were very much identical with the earlier codifications of law in the ancient world.

The Casuistic type. This was a case law (legal and social). This form introduced a specific **case** and it was also conditional - "if", and its consequence, "then", i.e., "If a man ..... then, he shall ...."

Apodictic law. This can be best illustrated by the Decalogue. It was imperative and prohibitive - "thou shalt not". It also included a curse **form**, e.g. "**whoever** curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death".

The comparison of the Israelite law with the Ancient Near East, and similar collections of laws shows vividly that the Israelite law has a considerable proportion of materials common to the oriental laws in general. But the unique character of the Israelite law stands out un-challenged. While the above laws were basically state or political, that of Israel was entirely religious. That is to say, regardless of origin or type, all the Israelite laws were considered as divine, and not natural, and they were related to the covenant. Since Israel was an elect nation, any obligation or law associated with that relationship was considered as divine and necessary for the stability and security of the nation where

justice would be dominant. Therefore the law was in no wise regarded as a burden to be borne by the Israelites; rather, it was embraced as a special legal code for them, to rule, regulate and organize their community.

The law of the covenant emphasised the close link between the people and Yahweh. Any treaty without a law, governing the obligations attached to it, will be meaninglessly violated.

The covenant law was both political and religious. But it must be borne in mind that one preceded the other, that is, Israel had a religious association with God prior to the political awareness. For instance, when the Hebrews were to be released from bondage in Egypt the main ground of excuse to grant them exit was, "to go a three day's journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God" (Ex. 3:18). There was no political interest attached to this journey whatsoever. When eventually the law was given in the wilderness, it ought to be viewed in all its ramifications as divine and religiously biased.

The covenant was made with Israel as a unit, as a corporate body. If any man violated any provision therein, he did not only suffer, but also, Israel as a nation may suffer collectively. According to the English version of the Holy Bible, the obligations attached to the Decalogue



may be viewed as being addressed to Israel both as a corporate body or as individuals. The pronoun "you" may be interpreted both ways. But the Hebrew version clearly shows that the pronoun is singular: יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: "I am the Lord your [singular] God" (Ex. 20:2). Also, verse 12 of the same chapter says: וְאֵל-אֲבִיךָ כִּבְדֹּת אֲבֹתֶיךָ: "Honour your [singular] father and your [singular] mother." Thus the individual was singled out in the covenant law. Similarly in Exodus 21:15, the law says: וְכִּי יִכּוּת אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ מוֹת יָמוּת: "Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death."

Though the covenant was given to Israel as a people, they had to be individually responsible as well, to the keeping of the covenant law. That is to say, that within the community, the place of the individual was significantly recognized and bound to Yahweh. For Israel to obey the commandments of Yahweh also means every individual must be obedient to him. Here, again, the uniqueness of the covenant law is shown. While the gods of the idolatrous societies were not freely accessible to their common subjects, the covenant God of Israel was not a respecter of

persons. All were equal before him. This was more pronounced in the phrase "no sinner will go unpunished."

Exodus 20-23; 34, as Yahweh's legislation for Israel, was the document which formed the starting point of the religious history of a nation chosen by God.

Exodus 22-23:19, was considered as the Sinaic "Book of the Covenant", given to a people who were settled and thoroughly accustomed to agriculture and initial developments. This section was an elaboration on the decalogue given to Israel. They should be faithful to Yahweh, and justice must prevail in their community. Human dignity was here emphasised as well. It was closed with the injunction to celebrate three national feasts, namely: the Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Ingathering, and the First fruits.<sup>4</sup>

#### A. The Secular Law.

The Mosaic law was given by God himself with Moses as the sole agent of transmission. The law was entirely reflecting on the character of God and the obligations

of the people in relation to both God and the other people, as God's creation. Hence both the cultic and secular laws were entirely divine. This fact was however true of the secular and idolatrous laws cited above. They were enacted with the authority of their national gods. For instance, the preamble and conclusion of the code of Hammurabi, were referred to as the will of Shamash, the god of Babylon. It is significant that this reference was restricted to the introductory and closing formulas of such laws. Thereafter the king as the representative of the god took over as the law giver. This shows a remarkable feature of difference between the law of Moses and those of the Ancient Near East secular laws. While the deity was silent in those laws, Yahweh, the God of Israel was active as the giver and sustainer of the Old Testament law. Moreover, the idolatrous kings were presented as the authority in giving the state laws. The deity thereby appeared for a ceremonial witness to the laws.

In the Old Testament, Yahweh was not only the giver of the law, every breach of such law was an offence against him. Moses as the agent of the law, also served as the

mediator between God and man when the law was broken. For instance, in Exodus 32:30-34, Moses played the role of a Pastor atoning for the sin of the people and in praying for God's forgiveness. A similar role was played in Numbers 14:13-19. It was due to Moses' mediation that God repented of his wrathful determination to destroy the unbelieving Israelites in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. When reference is made to the Mosaic law as the "Law of Moses", it should not be assumed as making the law a handiwork of Moses as in the case of the idolatrous kings. All that this phrase is expressing, is that Moses was the agent who conveyed the law from Yahweh to Israel.

The decalogue has been traditionally divided into two. The first four of the ten commandments form the central divine reference, and deal with our duties to God; and the other six deal with our duties to our neighbours. By this, the life of the people was re-ordered solely on religious law, and entirely depending upon the will of God. This clearly distinguished it from the Ancient Eastern laws. The law again depicts a pre-knowledge of religious awareness of the people, and this made the Law unique. Its uniqueness did not lie in the fact that it had a moral tone in weighty prohibitions of crimes including capital

offences. These were similar to the secular elementary bases of communal life among the idoltrous people: especially, the Orient. Moses might have been influenced in his stylistic form in sub-dividing the Law into those two categories. By connecting these moral precepts with the basic religious commands, the Decalogue surpassed other contemporary codes. This was perhaps the basis underlying the submission of Mckenzie<sup>5</sup>, that the knowledge of Yahweh was religious, while the knowledge of 'Elohim i.e., the plurality of God's majesty was moral. In any case, Yahweh should be known as the covenant God. To know him was to love him and obey his law in all its ramifications, in order to avoid his judgement. "Knowledge" here is, paralleled by Torah or the Law. To be acceptable before Yahweh, Israel must combine both together. His worship must be accompanied by moral obedience to his will.

## B. The Characteristics of the Mosaic Law

### i. The Sacredness of Human Life

The Book of the covenant portrayed the establishment of a deep religiously biased moral sensibility. For instance, a higher value was placed on human life than on any materialistic values. The death penalty was abolished for offences against property. But in the code of Hammurabi,

the Babylonian law allowed death penalty for such offences. Similarly, according to Exodus 21:20, 26f., the slave was protected from inhuman abuse. He was to be recognised as a human being, not the property of his owner to be treated merely as a thing, which was the common practice all over the ancient idolatrous world.

ii. Lack of Gross Brutality

One other interesting characteristic of the Code of Hammurabi which was abolished in the Israelite law, was gross brutality. Among such were bodily mutilations, such as severing off of the hands or legs, and the cutting off of the breasts, nose or ears. I Samuel II:2, gives us a vivid example of such bodily mutilations that prevailed in the ancient world, and among the Canaanites.

In the above passage, Nahash the Ammonite king, demanded that the right eyes of the Israelites be gouged out in order to grant them a treaty. Here, Nahash had already indicated the type of inhuman abuse meted out to their slaves, even before Israel was conquered in any eventual confrontation.

The great reverence given to human life in the covenant law may be traced to the very fact that man was created in God's own image. It was God who breathed the breath of life into the created man, and he became a living soul. To

take the life of man so created, was to deny God the ownership of "his life"; the consequence of which would be self-condemnation to death. Israel believed that it was only God who had the moral, and legal right to take the life of a human being. This concept should not be confused with the liquidation of life in warfare, or as a result of offence or sin connected with the violation of God's order concerning the prosecution of a war; such as the killing of Achan (Josh. 7:16-26).

The blood belonged to God. Israel was forbidden to eat the blood (Lev. 3:17; 7:26; Deut. 12:16). In the sacrifice which involved the shedding of animal's blood, the blood of that victim could only be sprinkled on the Israelites as a sign of purification or participation in sacrificial or covenant ceremonies. The rest of such blood was smeared on the altar of God as his own right (Ex. 24:6, 8).

### iii. Justice

Israel's sense of justice is another outstanding characteristic of the covenant law. There was no class distinction in the administration of justice within the Israelite community. God, they believed, was no respecter of persons. His law was to be binding on all citizens.

There was no special law for the Levites or priesthood in general; neither was there any special one for the aristocrats.

According to G.R. Driver<sup>6</sup>, the code of Hammurabi, like the early ancient codes of law, contained numerous class legislation. In the Book of the covenant, unparalleled equity was established. For instance, while the code of Hammurabi had the law relating to slaves at the end, it was given priority in the Israelite law (Ex. 21:1ff.).

One striking note on legislation concerning morality, is contained in Exodus 22:16-17. It appears that justice had not been properly done to the seduced virgin. But it



might be that some part of the original text was lost. Perhaps, Leviticus 20 will fit in here as the continuation of the Exodus passage. The whole chapter, especially verses 10ff., deal with the penalties for unchastity, punishable by death. This was more severe than the punishment meted out on unchastity in Babylonia. If one considers the pre-Mosaic marriage custom, one may tend to feel that nothing should be frowned against here. According to Genesis 16, the seduction of a handmaid to the status of a wife was allowed during the Abrahamic period? Also, in Genesis 21, the custom of that time allowed Jacob to marry two sisters simultaneously. In both cases, there was no objection raised against such marriages. Whether such a custom was conventional or legal, there is no evidence to counter the practice. It is obvious that it was basically the Ancient East custom of the Canaanites. The narrative in Exodus 22, should therefore be seen as a fair development over such a custom now legalised. It did not implicitly encourage the pre-Mosaic marriage tradition.

The above passage should be interpreted in conjunction with Exodus 21:7ff. In both cases, the rights of the virgin

were preserved. This was contrary to the Babylonian law or the Ancient Semitic law of marriage, which gave the husband the exclusive right over the woman or virgin.

iv. The Place of the wife in the covenant law

To do justice to the contrast between the covenant law and the Ancient Near East legislation, I must say here that the Israelite law also lacked certain rights which the wife enjoyed in Babylonia. The Book of the Covenant did not make any provision for the divorced wife or the widow. This mentality was sustained up till the New Testament period. While Christ himself was silent over this, the Apostles put up a non-chalant attitude to this vital necessity (Acts 6:1ff.)

In the Babylonian law,<sup>8</sup> the wife had the legal right to take the initiative in breaking up a marriage contract. She was not bound to share the debt incurred by the husband before marriage. There was a legal provision for the divorced or the widow in the Code of Hammurabi. As time went on, however, there were indications that the Israelites had a better regard for their wives. In II Kings 4:13, the Shunammite woman told prophet Elisha that

she dwelt among her own people, and as such, she did not require any assistance from either Gehazi or the prophet himself.

The ethical prophets later placed a higher value on marriage. They recalled the marriage concept of the ante-diluvian period. In creation, the wife was presented as a partner, or a help-meet to the man. The Yahweh-Israel treaty relationship was then likened to the marriage love and partnership between husband and wife. At all costs, Hosea was to redeem his whoresome wife, Gomer (Hos. 1:2ff.; 3:1ff.). This does not mean that a legal protection was given prostitution as in the case of the Code of Hammurabi. Cultic impurity and prostitution were condemned in Israel (Deut. 23:17f.; Amos 2:8).

So far, it has been clearly shown that the Book of the Covenant was a religious legalisation. The Israelite law in general was religiously based, though it was equally secular. This accounts for its uniqueness and superiority over the Ancient East idolatrous and mainly secular laws.

v. Administration of the lawa Moses and his lieutenants

The administration of the covenant law lay solely upon Moses and his lieutenants, the Levites, and the heads of the clans. Joshua took over from him as the sole leader. On assumption of office, according to Joshua 1:8, the Book of the Law was handed over to him as his companion in all his undertakings:

This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success.

b The Priests

Even though, there was not much specific mention of the judicial activities of the priests, their involvement in the administration of the law could not be ruled out, since both the cult and the society were interwoven.

Shortly before the monarchical period, Samuel was seen not only as the priest who succeeded Eli, but also the prophet (seer) and the chief judge of the whole nation (I Sam. 6:20; 7:15; 13:8-12). It was also the juristic function of the priesthood to be consulted for the divine decision on certain matters. The priests gave the divine guidance to both individuals and the nation as a whole (Gen. 25:22-23; I Sam. 9:69; 8:4ff.). Whatever the information given on such occasions, the priests were always in agreement with the divine rule of the people.

Deuteronomy 33:8-10, indicates that the priests were also involved in the collection, interpretation and teaching of the laws. If the predominance of the Levites at the great sanctuaries is indisputedly admitted, it follows then that their role would concurrently strengthen the influence of the covenant law upon the people.

### c. Judges

However, the book of Judges gives us the notion that the Judges took over from Joshua as both the Chief Commanders of the military force in Israel, and the Chief Judges of the nation (Judg. 3:9-19). They were undoubtedly guided by the Shechemite covenant involving all the Israelites (Josh. 24). This indicates that in practice, the administration of the covenant law lay largely in the hands of the laity. Joshua himself was a lay-man, and so were each of the Judges. The clan elders were very prominent in this course. According to Exodus 3:16, the elders of Israel were a senate of the people in Moses' time. This conventional practice continued throughout all the vicissitudes of Hebrew history. The sons of Samuel who were mentioned in I Samuel 8:1-2, were most certainly lay-men who assisted their father-priest in the administration of justice in Israel.

### d. Elders

In the post-exilic period, the elders were prominent leaders of the people in their administrative set up.

Similarly, in the New Testament period, according to Matthew 16:21; 21:23, the elders were often mentioned as acting co-ordinately with the chief priests and scribes. The Council of the Jews mentioned in Matthew 26:59, was otherwise known as the Sanhedrin.<sup>9</sup> It was the highest governing body in Israel during the time of Jesus. It was made up of both priests and laity.

#### vi. The Kings

The Monarchical period introduced the kings as the chief executors of the covenant law, (II Sam. 5:1-3) with its adaptation to suit the changing social situation. The king was the final court of appeal in legal disputes. The elders still continued to assist in the administration of justice. Whatever law the king promulgated (I Sam. 8:9; 10:25), it found its basis in the בְּרִית. Whatever new law or decree the king was to make, it must enjoy the support of the elders, and the people. At times, the priests and the prophets would have to endorse it. The people would see to it that such moves by the king was basically in accordance with the בְּרִית between them and Yahweh, and in conformity with natural justice (I Kgs. 20:

7ff.; II Kgs. 23:1ff.; II Kgs. 11). Otherwise, severe internal crisis may erupt.

When Solomon became the king, he was charged to rule by the provisions of the covenant law (I Kgs. 2:1ff.). Any attempt to deviate from the existing covenant law was to disrupt the Yahweh-Israel relationship. Solomon introduced "a law of the kingdom", and foreign customs not based on the בְּרִית and this earned him the disruption of his kingdom, which began during the reign of Rehoboam his son. This disintegration continued until the Northern Kingdom fell in 722/1 B.C., to the Assyrian empire, and the South, in 587/6 B.C., to the Babylonian empire. It is certain therefore, that the whole life of the Israelites was deeply rooted in the בְּרִית law, which a new monarchic institution with its despotic characteristic could not abrogate.

Israel grew up with the understanding of a saving will of God, based on the divine love, which must be realised by all means. The law of this God was then seen as embracing the secular and religious life of the people. Whoever occupied any recognised position among the people, be it the king, the judge, the priest, or the prophet, both



the secular and religious life of the elect nation must be organised in accordance with the covenant law based on the divine will. The leaders and the people must respond favourably in love to the divine act of election. In Leviticus 19, we find a divine fundamental social and ethical law enjoining all the people, not only to love God, but to love their parents and neighbours as well.

We now turn to the worship or outward expression of the covenant law.

### c. The Cultus

"Cultus" here means the practical expression of religious experience by the Israelites. It was a means of spiritual intercourse with God. Cultus is a means by which Yahweh communed with Israel, his worshippers. The divine blessing was also communicated to them during the outward actions of the cult. The religion of the Israelites was a living cultus, penetrating every aspect of their human life. The physical phenomenon of their cultus vividly expressed the spiritual reality of the object of worship, Yahweh; that is, like the ancient world, the outward expression was a symbolic significance of the spiritual

certainty. The physical phenomena of the Israelite-cultus included: the kneeling and prostration in prayer, sacred dances; antiphonal singing; the offering of various sacrifices and the observance of festivals; the setting up of sacred places; the separation of certain objects; and the setting apart of certain people for the worship of Yahweh.

i. Places of Worship

The comparative study of the religious feelings and expressions of worship of the Israelites corresponded considerably with those of the ancient world. The reverence accorded Yahweh necessitated the awareness to dedicate places for his worship. Various shrines, groves, altars, tabernacles, and temples were built for him. Moreover, this Deity also revealed himself to different people at particular places at different times. Instances of such revelations are found in the Old Testament, such as the oak of Moreh (Gen. 12:6); Mount Horeb (Ex. 3:1ff.), Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:17ff.) the waters of Meribah (Num. 20:8ff.), Mount Hor (Num. 20:22ff.) Mount Nebo (Deut. 34:1ff.), and Shechem (Josh. 24:1ff.). Such other places were the tabernacle: (Ex. 26f.); the tent of meeting at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1f.); the altar (Gen. 8:20f); and the temple - "House of God" (I Kgs. 6ff).

The presence of Yahweh was felt at those various spots and at similar places. They served as his dwelling places at different points in time. It did not follow that God was all that localized. Israel thought of Yahweh as their local God, yet he was not restricted to a place. They believed he moved along with them during their sojourning in the wilderness (Ex. 13:21; 19:38; 33:7-11; Josh. 10:14). The various shrines only served as the places where he periodically manifested himself to his people. However, during the Monarchical period, Proto-Isaiah was of the opinion that Jerusalem was inviolable, so also was the temple. But the exilic experience gave the Israelites a broader mind about the universalism of Yahweh and his religion. He could not be restricted to the temple in Jerusalem, since he was also the God of the Babylonians and the whole universe.

When Israel communed with God, it was all in spiritual experience. The invisibility of his divine nature was unique and conclusive. The Ark, and the mercy seat which was never occupied in the Holy of Holies, only signified his divine presence in the sanctuary. The Israelites believed convincingly that even though Yahweh appeared to them at various places, his dwelling place, like the Canaanite Baal, was in Heaven (Genesis 21:17; 22:11; Ex. 20:22; Ps. 2:4; Eccl. 5:2). That was why he could not be limited to a spot. and it enabled him to fellowship with

his elect people at will anywhere.

Yahweh was both transcendent and immanent. His mercy seat which remained permanently in the sanctuary, and, according to I Samuel 3:3, the lamp of God which continuously burned in the temple at Shiloh, confirmed his immanent presence among his people. There was no conditional period when Yahweh could only be consulted. He was approached at will. When Rebekah was in doubt about the state of her pregnancy, she immediately inquired of the LORD. After the annual worship and sacrifice at Shiloh, while all others had left, Hannah remained in the temple to request a child from the Lord (I Sam. 1). It was at night in a dream, that he appeared to King Solomon (I Kgs. 3:3ff.). The reality of the abiding presence and revelation of Yahweh is further stressed in Amos 9:1.

Of all the sacred places for meeting Yahweh, Israel was of the view that because of the location of the temple, Jerusalem became the most significant place. Both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, Jerusalem was to serve as the centre of the world where all the earth would come to the full knowledge of Yahweh.

The next topic to discuss is the sacrificial worship, or the ritual of sacrifice.

## ii. Ritual of Sacrifice

By ritual of sacrifice, we mean, the offering of gifts by the Israelites to Yahweh. It was divinely instituted by God as an aspect of worship. The word "sacrifice" comes from the Latin Sacer, that is, holy, and facere, which means "to make". These two words form sacrificium, meaning sacrifice. It is therefore the making of a religious holy act, by which offering is made to a deity in order to maintain or restore a right relationship of man to the sacred order.

It is not my intention to discuss this topic here, under a systematic enumeration of the various types of sacrificial ritual in the Old Testament. Rather, it will suffice to mention the fundamental meaning and significance of the sacrificial cultus of the elect people.

In any sacrifice, whether a gift or a meal, there were three parties of great and positive importance, namely: the deity to whom sacrifice was offered, that is, the object of worship; the worshipper who offered the sacrifice either all alone, or with the assistance of the

priest as the intermediary; and lastly, the victim which was used for the sacrifice. The victim was so important because it was a means to an end. It was an instrument by which the covenant relationship between the deity and the worshipper was established and upheld. All the above parties featured prominently in the Israelites' sacrificial system.

Sacrifices were necessary on many occasions such as the dedication or consecration of individuals or the community, or when new events were to be undertaken by such persons. For instance, the choice of a king was confirmed in the sanctuary by sacrifice (I Sam. 11:15). Children were consecrated to God and confirmed with sacrifice (I Sam. 1:24f.). Wars were embarked upon only after necessary sacrifices had been made (Judg. 20:26; I Sam. 13:8ff.). According to Psalms 20:3ff., victory over an enemy was assured by the sacrifice, because with the acceptance of the sacrifice, the presence and power of Yahweh would lead the battle. At the completion of the wall of Jerusalem, Nehemiah, the priests, and all the Jews offered great sacrifices of burnt and meal offerings (Neh. 12:43).

Among the non-Jews, sacrifice-victims included human beings. When Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho in the days of Arab, he laid its foundation with Abiram, his first born, and set up its gate with Segub, his youngest son (I Kgs. 16:34). There is also trace of human sacrifice in Hebrew tradition (Gen. 22:1-19; Jug. 11:29-40).

Whichever sacrifice was offered to God, the best of the prescribed victim must be offered. For instance, in order to continue to enjoy a future abundant yield of the agricultural produce Yahweh, the divine owner of the land, must be offered the first and best of the fruits. This does not mean that without a token gift to Yahweh, he could not, or he would not act efficiently or favourably to his people. Unlike the lesser deities of Canaan, Yahweh could act without necessarily waiting to be placated with sacrificial influences.

The Israelites were quite conscious of their shortcomings and sins. To appease God and avert his anger, and restore the separated fellowship, appropriate sacrifice must be offered to him. Sacrifice was also a means of establishing mystical union with God through the communion meal by the worshipper. When the sacrificial victim was ceremonially eaten, the covenant relationship was strengthened.

When they were in fellowship with Yahweh, they shared in his life as he took to himself at the sacrifice, the sweet savour as his own share.

For the purpose of atonement for sin, the sinner was represented by the slaughtered animal at sacrifice. He thereby altered his previous guilt and death, or any possible consequence. When the blood of the victim was poured on the altar of the deity the life of the sacrificer was brought into contact with that deity, thereby achieving a reunion and continued fellowship with Yahweh.

It is very essential at this juncture to emphasize that whatever the motive and significance of any sacrifice, it must be acceptable to Yahweh before it could achieve any effect. In Isaiah 1:11-13, the prophet indicated clearly that any act of external worship in the form of sacrifice which did not reflect upon a true inner conviction was void, null, unacceptable, and of no significance. This was the prophetic assessment of the vain sacrificial rites performed by the polluted priests and the apostate Israel. It was a vain exercise to undertake any act of exterior worship, including sacrifice, without having any interior disposition. The covenant law must be perfectly observed.



According to the ethical prophets outward act without inner penitence made sacrifice insignificant and useless (Isa. 1:11; Jer. 7:22f.; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21ff.; Mic. 6:6ff.).

All that the Old Testament sacrifices stood for within the covenant context, has been perfectly fulfilled by Christ, who himself was the paschal lamb for the universal and unique atonement for the sins of mankind. As it was demanded of all the Israelites who were a party to the covenant relationship, the Church of Christ has to exercise the act of faith and accept the unique sacrifice of Christ for all, and live a perfect life worthy of her calling. This of course is implied by the admonition of Christ himself when he said:

God is spirit, and those  
who worship him must  
worship in spirit and truth.  
(Jn. 4:24).

Before we proceed to discuss the instruments of the covenant, we shall look into some festivals of the covenant law.

### iii. Ceremonies of Feasts

The covenant law prescribed special feasts to be observed from time to time by the Israelites. One Hebrew name for festival is חג. It is from the verb signifying

"to dance". When this is applied to religious worship, it indicates that festivals are occasions of joy and dancing. They are moments of merry-making.

The Yahweh cultus was enriched by many festivals and feasts. This was so because the Israelites led an agrarian life. For the Canaanites, the production of crops depended mainly on the favour enjoyed from the various gods and goddesses of the land. Yahweh was seen by the Israelites as the divine owner of their land. He gave the increase of the soil. According to Exodus 12:3ff., the celebration of the cultus feasts was to be made on a house or clan basis, even though the feasts were congregational affairs. In I Samuel 20:6, Jonathan indicated that the yearly sacrifice in Israel was on family basis.

The festivals enjoined by the Mosaic Law may be classified under the following two groups, namely, the Feasts of the Cycle of Sabbaths and the yearly festivals. All feasts were holy unto Yahweh. Let us now consider these two groups of festivals.

1. The Feasts of the Cycle of Sabbaths.

The Feasts of the Cycle of the Sabbaths included the following:

a. The Weekly Sabbath

Exodus 20:8-11, made it mandatory upon the covenant people that the sabbath must be kept by all, both Israel and the strangers within them. All their beasts must also keep

the sabbath. It was a day of solemn rest, and of a holy convocation (Lev. 23:3). The sabbath was to be the sign of the covenant and of the sanctification of the people unto the Lord. (Ex. 31:12). The observance of this continued perpetually in Israel.

During post-exilic Judaism, Nehemiah took steps to see that the sabbath was kept properly. We find in Trito-Isaiah (Isa. 58), a strong plea for strict observance of the sabbath, a theme echoed by Nehemiah during his reform. This observance was also to remind them that Yahweh was the Lord of time. His fellowship must be sought in spite of the pressing business of the time.

b. The Feast of Trumpets

This feast is otherwise called the feast of the seventh new moon. Details of this feast are contained in Numbers 28:11-15; 29:1-6. It was to be of a holy convocation and of rest. Burnt offerings and cereal offerings were to be offered to the LORD. Trumpets were to be blown at the occasion to mark the beginning of the civil year, called Eth'anim or Tishri.

The observance of this feast (Num. 29:1) involved the chanting of Psalms 81 and 29, in the morning and evening respectively by the priests and Levites, in the later times.

It is interesting to note that the month Tis'ri was distinguished above all other months of the year for the multitude of ordinances connected with it apart from the feast of Trumpets. Others were the day of Atonement, and the feast of Tabernacles. Also, the first day of the month was consecrated to sacred rest and spiritual devotion.

### c. The Feast of the Sabbatical Year

This feast was to be observed every seventh year. Exodus 23:10-11 made it mandatory upon the Israelites to till their lands for six consecutive years, but in the seventh year the land must be allowed to rest and lie fallow. This feast was also significant, in that it was to provide an opportunity for the poor and the beasts to eat out of the remnants of the harvested crops. According to Leviticus 19:9; 23:22, the Israelites were not allowed to reap their fields to their borders in any year.

Apart from the above, the observance of the feast was significant for the people of God in that, it emphasised the concept that the goal of life for the elect people did not lie in that incessant labouring of the earth (Ref. Gen. 3:17-19). If they strove to keep the

covenant obligations, their goal was to attain the perfect rest. Whatever might be their spiritual understanding of the feast, the spirit of the sabbatic year was to be that of the weekly sabbath. The fourth and last feast under the feasts of the cycle of the sabbaths was that of Jubilee.

#### d. The Year of Jubilee

The feast of Jubilee was a remarkable year of release. It was observed every fiftieth year. The trumpet was to be blown on the day of atonement during the year of the feast, and liberty was to be proclaimed throughout the land. It was the year each property was to be returned to the owner with amicable settlement; hence it was also called the Year of liberty (Lev. 25:28; Ezek. 46:17). Details of the observance of the feast are given in Leviticus 25:8-16, 23-55; 27:16-25.

The feast was obligatory upon the redeemed nation, as it proclaimed to the covenant people, the gracious love, care and presence of God with them all throughout their life-history. During this festival, the soil must rest also from cultivation of certain crops (Lev. 25:11). This was to allow the soil to enjoy a holy rest. At Jubilee,

certain properties in fields and houses obliged to be sold by the owners through poverty, and which had not been redeemed, were to revert to their original owners without payment. According to Leviticus 25:29-35, all the Israelites, who through poverty had sold themselves to their country-men, or to foreigners who settled in their land, should go out free with their children. This was provided they had been unable to redeem themselves or had not been redeemed by kinsmen before the year of Jubilee.

The year of Jubilee was therefore a year of grace and freedom for all suffering. In this year, every kind of oppression was to cease, and every member of the covenant people was to enjoy perfect remission and redemption from all debts and bondage.

## 2. The Yearly Festivals

The second group of the covenant festivals was the yearly feasts which included the following:

### a. The Feast of the Passover

At best, Unleavened bread was used. The feast was commemorated yearly. The injunction and details of its

observance are given in Exodus 12:1-28. It was commemorated in remembrance of the great deliverance of the Hebrews from the Egyptian bondage. It was observed on the fourteenth day of the first month (Nisan). It was a festival which proclaimed the redeeming grace of the covenant God. The festival stressed the fundamental act of Yahweh in delivering a people elected in the past for his purpose.

The Passover festival was the greatest of the three annual festivals in Israel. In Hebrew, "Passover" means פֶּסַח. It is from the verb pasah, that is, to "leap over". Figuratively "Passover" means a festival during which the Israelites were passed over, by virtue of the paschal sacrifice in Egypt. (Ex. 12:21, 27; 12:1-13). Thus, Israel was delivered from bondage, and in a concrete act adopted as the nation of Yahweh. According to Exodus 6:6-7, this festival laid the foundation of Israel's birth "... and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God". It was a new birth of life of grace and fellowship with God (Ex. 3:13-17; 6:2-4).

The annual observance of the feast was necessary in order to bear witness to the great deliverance of God, and

his adoption of the people. "And when your children say to you, 'what do you mean by this service?' you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover'". (Ex. 12:26-27). The paschal lamb was a sacrifice. It signified a sin offering offered for the people to reconcile them with God, and afford them a new fellowship with him. The lamb suffered instead of the sacrificers. This was entirely a means of grace.

This unique sacrifice was followed by the meal offering. The Unleavened bread symbolized the spiritual purity, after which Israel was to strive as a covenant nation. The bitter herbs were to remind them of their painful humiliation and bondage in Egypt, out of which they were delivered.

b. Pentecost

The second of the three important annual festivals was Pentecost. It is otherwise referred to as, "The feast of weeks", because it was celebrated seven weeks or the 50th day after the Passover (Lev. 23:15-16). According to verse 16, a cereal offering of new grain was to be offered to the LORD on this occasion, during a holy



convocation.

Numbers 28:26, indicates that this festival could also be referred to as, "The feast of the first fruits", because, the first loaves made from the new grain were then offered on the altar (Lev. 23:15-17). The sacrificial details of the feast are contained in Leviticus 23:15-20, and Numbers 28:26-30.

This festival was to be a season of great rejoicing, involving the whole nation, including all the aliens in Israel. Deuteronomy 16:9-12, indicates that this great festival was to recall their bondage in Egypt, and admonished them to keep to the divine law of the covenant between them and Yahweh. It is implied here, therefore, that this feast was also to commemorate the giving of the covenant law on Mount Sinai.<sup>10</sup> The importance of this feast is attested by Acts 2:5-11. It is inferred here that throughout the life history of the Israelites up to the great Pentecost event of the Apostolic age, the embracing of this festival by all the Jews, was not limited to Jerusalem or Palestine. Both Jews of the diaspora and non-Jews from distant countries made a pilgrimage to the holy land to celebrate the annual festival in accordance

with the injunction of God as testified to in Deuteronomy 16.

c. The Feast of Tabernacles

This is the third of the great annual festivals. It is otherwise called "The festival of Tents" or "booths". This was because the Israelites were commanded to live in booths during the celebration of the feast (Lev. 23:40-43). The feast was certainly to commemorate the experience of the Israelites of wandering in the wilderness. During this period, they lived in pitched booths until they eventually settled in Canaan, the promised land.

It was to be commemorated for seven days in the seventh month, Tis'ri (II Chron. 8:13, Ezz. 3:4, Zech. 14:16-19). The Feast of Ingathering was also observed in connection with the festival of tents (Ex. 23:16; Lev. 23:39-43; Ex. 34:22). Other principal passages that refer to this feast are Deuteronomy 16:13-15; 31:10-13, and Nehemiah 8:1ff.

The booth was not only to remind them of the fatherly care of Yahweh, and his protection during their journeying from Egypt through the wilderness to Canaan; it was also to celebrate their settlement in the promised land.

According to Psalm 27:5; 31:20; and Isaiah 4:6, Israel had

been preserved and protected from heat, storm and tempest in the wilderness. They later had a permanent shelter in the promised land. As such, the festival must be an occasion of great jubilation. However, during the feast, they had to live in pitched booths located in courts, streets and public squares. This was not to recall their wilderness suffering, or to subject themselves to any temporary inconvenience. Rather, the feast was commemorated with the spirit of jubilation and enthusiasm, indicating an occasion of a feast of covenant renewal of Yahweh's promise to settle the Israelites in the promised land. It prefigured the ingathering of all nations under the cover and shelter of God.

#### d. The Day of Atonement

Another important and the last of the yearly feasts in Israel was the Day of Atonement. It was the day appointed for a yearly, general, and perfect expiation for all sins and uncleanness which might remain unatoned for, despite the numerous regular sacrifices. Therefore, it was the climax of the yearly festivals, and of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. It was an annual congregational

feast of burnt and sin offerings for all the sins committed within the year.

The object of the feast is clearly stated in Leviticus 16:33, which indicates that the High priest, "shall make atonement for the sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly." The importance of this great feast emphasises the concept of Hebrews 10:1, that despite the Law and the elaborate sacrifices offered year by year, Israel did not attain perfection as intended by the covenant obligations. Even with the most scrupulous observance of the prescribed ordinances, many sins and defilements would still remain unacknowledged, and therefore without expiation. The day of atonement was designed to make a perfect expiation for all the sins which had remained uncleansed and unatoned for, in the course of the year. The Day of atonement, was an occasion when Israel was reconciled unto Yahweh.

According to R. S. Paul, "The Atonement was the state or act of bringing into accord, restoration of friendly or cordial relations and reconciliation. It brought about the

condition of being at one with others, unity of feeling, harmony and agreement.<sup>11</sup> From the above, the basic meaning of Atonement would be, simply, the state of being or becoming "at one" reconciled with someone else. The covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel was not only to unite Yahweh with Israel; it must also unite all the Israelites together as one family in the covenant. According to the covenant law, Israel was expected to be in fair relationship even with non-Jews as well. Ritually important as the feast of the Atonement was, according to Hebrews 10:1, 14, the imperfection of these covenant sacrifices is depicted in their continuous annual repetition. They continue to keep alive a sense of sin and guilt. In Christ, all that the Old Testament sacrifices stood for, including the Atonement, was met. "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified."

The efficacy of this universal atonement lies with the response of individuals to it in the act of faith. Hebrews 10:16-17 reflect, on Jeremiah's concept of the New Covenant: "This is the covenant that I will make with them ... I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on

their minds, ... I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more." By the atoning sacrifice of Christ, perfect remission and forgiveness of sins have been attained. Any offering for sin is no longer needed.

The next section deals with the major agents used by God, in founding the covenant people, Israel. They were also used in establishing the nation as a unit. They played vital roles at different periods in sustaining the treaty among the chosen people. These outstanding agents or instruments were the prophets, the priests and the judges.

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## 2. THE INSTRUMENTS OF THE COVENANT

### A1 Moses and the Prophets

God as the initiator of his covenant, was also the originator of his own religion practised by his chosen people. However, he contracted his covenant with individuals and later with a people. When he wanted to release the Hebrews from bondage in Egypt he used Moses, principally, to lead the people. At Mount Sinai, the covenant law was given by God through Moses. The unique roles that Moses played throughout the formative period of the covenant people were enormous. It is thus difficult to classify categorically the office which Moses occupied (Ex. 18:13, 15).

Though Moses was the agent of the covenant people, he could not be categorised solely as a priest or an inspired seer, a prophet, or a judge. It will be unfair either to consider him as a king or a commander of the army of Israel; yet all these qualities were found in him. His charismatic leadership was of no equal.

While Moses did not perform any sacrificial offering, as a priest, (this task was reserved for Aaron and the Levites)

yet he performed a pastoral job which was considered as the prerogative of the priest (Ex. 32:30ff; Num. 14:13ff.). Suffice to say here that Moses should at best be seen predominantly as the charismatic leader of Israel. He was the mediator between his people and Yahweh (Ex. 19:3ff., 20:18ff., Deut. 5:24ff.).

Thus, it is proper to consider Moses in a unique class of his own. He was an outstanding instrument in the contracting and consolidating of the covenant relationship. We can now examine briefly the roles of some other agents of the covenant such as the prophets, priests and judges.

### THE PROPHETS

The Prophetic gift existed long before the prophetic office was instituted. Abraham was called a prophet (Gen. 20:7). In Psalms 105:15, the patriarchs were called prophets. The office was first instituted under Moses. The gift of prophecy may not always be connected with the office; e.g., Daniel had the gift but was not called a prophet. Deborah was a prophetess, but she was principally recognized as a judge (Jug. 4:4). A prophet may also be a pastor or shepherd (1 Sam. 3:20; 7:10, 15ff.).

The Hebrew word for prophet is נָבִיא, from



the verb naba', which means: to gush out, or boil up as a fountain, that is, to be inspired. It is identical with the Akkadian verb nabu, to announce, or declare. The primary idea of a prophet, therefore, was an announcer or a declarer of the will of God - pouring forth the declaration of God. He acted as spokesman for another (Ex. 4:16; 7:1). He spoke authoritatively for God, as interpreter of His will. He was therefore, God's ambassador representing God's will before men.

"Seer" was the more ancient term (1 Sam. 9:9) "Seer" in Hebrew word is ro'eh or hozeh, i.e., one who sees. It may also be sofeh, i.e., a watchman. Seers in Israel were no mere predictors. They spoke by a divine communication, so revealed to them. They were seen as men of vision. They pictured the certainty of the over-ruling of the Universe on the part of God, through various means, such as being divinely inspired to communicate God's will to people sometimes through oracles.

#### ii. Prophetic Function

The prophetic institution was not an accident in the Old Testament. It was provided in the covenant Law (Deut. 18:9, 15-22), that Israel might not consult with false prophets or Seers, diviners or the Canaanite astronomers. The idea of covenant in prophecy gained importance mostly, in exilic and post-exilic times. Pre-exilic prophets, especially, the

eighth century ethical prophets such as Amos and Micah did not speak of covenant. They knew the concept of election. Hosea and Isaiah of Jerusalem used the term a few times.

The Prophets had a practical office to discharge. According to the prophetic books, it was their covenant or election commission to show the people of God their transgressions and sins (Isa. 58:1; Ezek. 22:2; 43:10; Mic. 3:18). It was their duty to admonish and reprove the people to be faithful to Yahweh. They were to denounce the abominations of the people and threaten them with the terrors of divine judgement upon the sinners. As watchmen, they were to blow the trumpet about any imminent danger. Their message was of emotional confrontation with reality, thereby declaring fundamental trends in existence. They were therefore, revolutionaries. Each of these prophets put emphasis on certain aspects about the character of God in regard to the covenant obligation. That is, no single prophet gave a complete view of the covenant God, but all of them functioned towards and for the same goal. They were not to be silent, at rest, in reminding the people of their election obligations to Yahweh. They were the pastors and ministers of the elect nation, declaring to the people the message of consolation and pardon (Isa. 40:1-2; Ezek. 3:17; 33:7-9; Jer. 6:17; Isa. 62:6f).

Unlike the priests (whom we shall treat next) the

classical prophets did not seem to have had any official function from the government or political rulers,<sup>12</sup> rather, they were exclusively special messengers from God. The ethical prophets emphasized the need to practice the election justice. They defended the truth and righteousness of God. Any cultus ritual without moral was to no avail. The core of their message was related to the gracious purpose of the Israelite election relationship (Mic. 7:20; Isa. 60:3). Israel was to be unique of all nations, through whom Yahweh would be acknowledged as the God of the whole universe.

The moral or ethical prophets were inclined to recall the unfaithful Israelites to faithfulness to their election by the faithful Yahweh (Amos 3: Hos. 2: Jer. 2). The love of Yahweh shows him as a forgiving God. (Jer. 31: 34), who will restore the election relationship (Zech. 8:8) According to Ezekiel, as for Hosea, the covenant was a marriage (Ezek. 16:60). In Hosea 2:16, Israel was the wife. (See also Jeremiah 3:4, 8; Isaiah 54:5). Amos and Jeremiah claimed that in the day of Israel's virginity there was no sacrifice (Amos 5:25; Jeremiah 2:1-3; 7:22). "Sacrifice to other gods is adultery", they claimed. (Hos. 1-3; Ex. 34:14-16; Deut. 31:16; Jer. 3; Ezek. 16:25-29).

Let us now examine succinctly, the specific roles played by some of the outstanding prophets, to enhance the faithfulness of Israel to the election obligations.

a. Samuel: Samuel was the spokesman to Israel on the behalf of Yahweh as none other since Moses had been. He probably originated, and certainly developed, the "Schools of the prophets". These were training-schools for young men who felt called to the prophetic office. The schools performed the important work of preserving the traditions and initiating the historical literature of Israel. The editors or compilers of the prophetic or historical books were not writing history as a modern historian would. They were writing with a religious mind for a religious purpose. Their goal was to teach religious lessons rather than the facts of history.

In the reign of David there began that close association between the kings and the prophets which persisted until the Exile. The most important prophets before the rise of the writing and ethical prophets in the eighth century B.C. were Elijah and Elisha. They were both revolutionaries. They fought rigorously against Baalism to promote Yahwism (I Kgs. 17-19; 21; II Kgs. 2; 8; 9; 13). Monotheism was sternly championed.

The eight century B.C. saw the rise of a great prophetic movement. Here we reach the heights of Hebrew prophecy and see the prophet exercising his characteristic function as the preacher of the Divine will, declaring the character and purpose of Yahweh and calling the elect nation to repentance and holy living. This great movement began with Amos and Hosea, both of whom prophesied to the Northern kingdom.

b. Amos: Amos was the prophet of justice. Israel failed to fulfil God's demand for righteousness. The book of Amos is composed of visions, oracles and narratives, all of these place the prediction of imminent ruin of Israel as the centre of the prophet's message, namely this, "Yahweh was about to destroy his chosen people for their sins". Similarly, the neighbouring idolatrous nations would be destroyed. The wrath of Yahweh, the creator of the universe was therefore a righteous one. This is how Amos should be seen when referred to as the messenger of the wrath of God or of doom.<sup>13</sup>

Amos stressed the Mishpat and S<sup>e</sup>dhakah of Yahweh, that is, the justice and righteousness of God (Amos 5:7, 24, 27). By all means, Yahweh was pre-eminently the God of justice and righteousness. His election love remained firm. But the immorality, wickedness, oppression of the poor,

and hard-heartedness of the people alienated them from Yahweh. It was for their transgressions and sins that they were to be devastated. Yahweh the Lord of history would certainly fulfil his judgement on Israel for their failure to repent.

c. Hosea: Hosea's message was centred on his domestic experience. He emphasized that Israel as a faithless wife could only be redeemed by the divine love of Yahweh, her faithful and loving husband. Israel broke the bond between her and Yahweh. Israel was bound to God by hesedh, i.e., the covenant love (Hos. 2; 3: 1ff). According to Snaith<sup>14</sup>, the Covenant love is parallel to "Zeal". The obligation binding the two parties must be honoured with steadfast zeal. Lofthouse<sup>15</sup> went a bit further to suggest that such steadfast zeal must abide with patience. God himself was loving, merciful, steadfast and long suffering. Yahweh had always been patient with Israel, as Hosea was patient with Gomer. The patience must be reciprocal. The people's sins, therefore, lay in their failure to

honour the bond obligations, i.e., to love Yahweh with steadfast love or Zeal patiently.

The contemporaries of Amos and Hosea in the southern kingdom were Isaiah and Micah.

d. Isaiah: Proto-Isaiah taught explicit reliance on Yahweh for defence, protection and preservation. He would never disappoint his chosen people. "Isaiah" means "Jehovah saves". Jerusalem would be saved by God, the Holy One. The Israelites were holy people to Yahweh, therefore, they should not ally with unholy people. Israel failed to turn to God, and she was sent into exile. But the Deutero-Isaiah held out to the exiles the hope of return to Judea, with a mission to the world. All men would come to recognize Yahweh as the Creator, Lord and Saviour of the whole universe. This message was well emphasized in the servant songs, as indicating the profound significance of the Israelite religion.

The Oracles of Isaiah may be classified under the following four themes:

First, the reign of the ideal king, i.e., the Messianic

Oracles. He spoke of the Anointed One, the Prince of peace (Isa. 2:2-4; 4:2-6; 7:10-16; 9:2-7). The shoot from the stump of Jesse was in accordance with the covenant promise made to establish David's Kingdom. In his vision of Yahweh, the holy king (Isa. 6:1ff), probably during some festal occasion, the eternal choice of Zion and David was celebrated.

Second, the doctrine of Remnant. This was symbolic of the name of the prophet's son, Shear-jashub, meaning, "the remnant shall return" (Isa. 7:3). Yahweh in his justice would not deal with Israel like Sodom and Gomorah. The repentant remnant would return to the Holy One of Israel (Isa. 10:20ff). This remnant was therefore, the element of permanent value in Judah (Isa. 28:5).

Third, the necessity of faith. To be established as God's elect, Israel must believe strongly in Yahweh (Isa. 7:1-9). God must be relied and depended upon wholly, and not Egypt or the chariots of Assyria. There must be total trust in him (Isa. 30:15; 31:1). He must be obeyed, for he was their refuge.



Fourth, the doctrine of the inviolability of Jerusalem. Yahweh would ever defend and preserve Jerusalem. The security at that time, that is, during the reign of Hezekiah, was ensured. Jerusalem would not be molested for trusting on Yahweh (Isa. 31:4-9). God would fight for her on Mount Zion. The temple in Jerusalem was a site of holy community that the state of Judah would not be completely overthrown.

e. Micah: Micah's message was parallel with Amos' message. They both championed the welfare of the poor and needy. Micah cried out against the oppression of the rural communities. He emphasized the law of universal morality, and brought about a major repentance among the people of Judah. Like Hosea, the prophet stressed Yahweh's election love. Therefore, Yahweh must be worshipped seriously with a living personal faith, just as the prophet's faith urged him to admonish his people for repentance. Hope, faith, and love, were qualities required of any worshipper of Yahweh. It was the covenant love of God that sustained Judah (Mic. 1:7; 2:12f).

Finally, though Israel was constantly unfaithful, Yahweh remained faithful to the marriage covenant and restored Israel to the original relationship (Hos. 2:14-23; Jer. 3:1, 14; Ezek. 16:60-63; Isa. 54:1-8; 61).

It is important to note that the prophets saw the danger of legalism implicit in the covenant conception. The covenant was to be established forever. God on his part was fulfilling the covenant compact. Despite the fact that the covenant law had been written and handed over to the Israelites, they on their part continued to neglect the covenant obligations. The statutes, ordinances and the commandments were summarily violated (See Gen. 17:1-21; Ex. 31:18; Deut. 4:13f). In the light of this, the prophets looked for a new covenant of which the law would no longer be written on tables of stone, but in the hearts of the people (Hos. 2:19-20; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 16:60-63; Isa. 61:8). It was to perfect the covenant relationship that the new covenant foretold by Jeremiah was culminated in the blood of Jesus Christ as the "new covenant" par excellence (see I Cor. 11:25; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20).

The next instruments to discuss are the priests.

## B. The Priests

The Hebrew word Kohen - כֹּהֵן, means "priest". It is also used for the priest of foreign gods. Etymologically, kohen is related to the Akkadian verb kanu, from the root K'n, which means "to bend down, to do homage". It is also related to kwn which means "to stand upright" <sup>16</sup> From the aforesaid, the priest would therefore necessarily be someone who officially stands before a deity or a superior in the capacity of his priesthood. He is then a religious official who gives guides to worshippers of a deity. He approaches the deity on behalf of religious adherents by means of sacrifice. He may be directly connected with the state affairs, especially, during the monarchical period.

All the above facts were true of the Jewish priests of the Old Testament. They were appointed primarily to administer sacrifice, a religious act of worship, in the sanctuaries in accordance with the covenant law. They were not antagonistic with the prophetic class. The prophets only condemned the priestly offices when priesthood became a mere formality and routine for personal gains.

### i. The Duty of the Priests

As God's representatives among his Elect nation, the priests put on the sanctuary costume, the ephod (I Sam. 21: 9), in the exercise of their duties. The costume of the high priest who was at the head of the priestly order, was of a greater symbolic significance. The gold and precious stones on it represented God's glory. He represented the whole nation by the breast plate with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, the covenant people.

It was the duty of the priests also, especially the Levites, to take charge of the Ark of the covenant, the Urim and Thummim.<sup>17</sup> They were to instruct the worshippers. This shows that like the prophets they were not lacking in the knowledge and interpretation of the Torah. When the priests delivered oracles, this was a function where they passed on an answer from the deity to the worshippers. When the priests gave instruction to them, they were teaching them and interpreting the law of such deity to the adherents. This was another principal function of the Old Testament priests. They were the intermediaries or mediators between the holy Yahweh and the sinful Israelites.

## ii. The Post-Exilic function of the Priests

With the rise of Judaism in post-exilic period, the priests became prominent and significantly independent. The reason for this development is not far-fetched. Monarchy and prophetic inspiration had considerably ceased. The priests now became the custodians of the Law, in teaching and interpreting it. The priestly office became a specialization of the faithful. For example, Ezra, the Scribe, the doctor of the Law, was seen as the father of Judaism in his capacity as the priest. In all his functions whether priestly or catechetical, his ultimate aim was to present the Jews a "holy nation" before the holy God. This was the primary aim of Jeremiah's concept of the New Covenant.

According to Malachi 2:7, the function of the priest was to guard knowledge, and give instruction to men on the basis of the "Pentateuch", the Covenant Law. He was also called "the messenger of the LORD of hosts". That is to say that the post-exilic priestly office was given a greater divine dignity by equating them with "the angels". The priests could now prophesy.

According to Josephus,<sup>18</sup> the High Priest Hyrcanus, while offering incense in the temple heard a heavenly voice telling him that his sons had just won the victory over Antiochus. This prophetic gift of the priest was prominent until the New Testament period. In the fourth gospel, the High Priest Caiaphas is supposed to have the gift of prophecy (Jn. 11:51).

Priestly functions were not limited to the priestly tribe only. Israel as a nation was equally entrusted with the priestly responsibilities. This was the central message of Deutero-Isaiah's servant's song in Isaiah 49:1-6. Similarly, Exodus 19:6, says:

And you shall be to me  
a kingdom of priests  
and a holy nation.

This was a covenant responsibility bestowed upon the elect nation. Trito-Isaiah confirmed this in Isaiah 61:6, in the end all the redeemed would be called the priests of the LORD, and the ministers of God.

### C. The Judges

Another category of agents which we have to discuss under the Instruments of the covenant is the Judges.

The Hebrew word for "judges" is from the verb שָׁפַט - "for judge". The participle שֹׁפֵט means "a judge". The judges procured justice for the Israelites, not only in delivering them from their enemies, but also by administering the laws and rites of the Lord (Judg. 2:16-19). According to Judges 17:6; 18:1; 21:25, there was no charismatic leader in Israel. The people were left an easy prey to idolatrous influences. The covenant laws were violated. God allowed them judges, who acted as agents of the divine will.

Another important issue to examine is, whether the judges should be included among the religious leaders or regarded merely as military generals, since it appears religious activities were of secondary importance to them. Whatever our arguments might be, as to the various circumstances that brought these judges up to rule, one thing is certain, and that is, they all followed Joshua, who was the immediate successor of Moses. Their subsequent roles were a combined effort to settle the whole tribes of

Israel in the promised land (Judg. 1:1; 2:1). Therefore, their conquest of Canaan should be viewed as an explicitly religious task to achieve the covenant promise. Yahweh was still in control of the national affairs. Every guidance was taken from God as regards the prosecution of the various wars (see Judg. 1:1f.; 3:1f., 4:23; 8:23; 11:32; 13:3ff., 20:26f.).

From the above, and in summarising the circumstances of this period, one may categorically say that theocracy reached its peak in Israel. In effect, the heavenly host took an active part in most of the military campaigns, as it did in the time of Moses and Joshua. This means that, despite the disintegration of the nation into ethnic units, Yahweh was still recognized as the God of the people. Consequently, he took charge of the political affairs. This again reinforced the nation's unique religious awareness among other nations, as the people of the promise. By all means, the God of covenant was to fulfil his age-long promise to settle them permanently in Canaan. Hence it will be wrong to regard the judges as merely "secular" or political leaders. Barak, the army commander, did not hide his inferiority in comparison with Deborah, the judge:



If you Deborah will go with me,  
 I will go;  
 But if you will not go with me,  
 I will not go.

(Judg. 4:8)

This implied that while Barak realized that his call was made by God through Deborah, the woman judge, Deborah's appointment was directly made by God. Before their confrontation with the Canaanites, Deborah assured Barak of God's victory over their enemies thus:

For the LORD will sell Sisera  
 into the hand of a woman

(Judg. 4:9)

The Judges regarded themselves as servants of the national God who were graciously chosen to carry out his saving act.

Judges 9, gives us the rule of Abimelech who from all indications could be viewed as a self-made judge/king. Jotham's fable showed that he was rejected by both God and Israel. Shechem was condemned because Abimelech was installed as a judge/king. Though he forcefully ruled over Israel for three years, Judges 9:23, says: "And God sent an

evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech." Both Abimelech and all his accomplices were summarily destroyed (Judg. 9:56-57). It followed therefore, without exaggeration, that the chaotic period of the Judges was still under the perfect control of Yahweh, who was the great Redeemer of his chosen people. Though they constantly sinned, violating the covenant law, yet, God who never failed on his own part of the contract, constantly brought order into the national dislocations, through the divinely guided actions of the Judges, who were instruments of Yahweh's dominion over his covenant people.

Apart from the divinely chosen agents of the Yahweh-Israel treaty, another crucial topic to examine in the next section is, "the sacred objects of the covenant". These are: the tent of meeting, the Ark of the Covenant, and the empty throne. They represented the physical presence of Yahweh in the midst of the people. Others to consider are, the rod of God; the sacred lot of Urim and Thummim, and the Ephod.

### 3. THE SACRED OBJECTS OF THE COVENANT

#### A. THE TENT OF MEETING

The terms of the Yahweh-Israel covenant, have clearly indicated that God will graciously descend and dwell among his chosen people. He would welcome their approach as long as they abide within the provisions of the compact. To effect this divine communion there was the need to provide the Tent, Tabernacle or Temple as God's house among the elect people. This gave the Israelites the convincing assurance of Yahweh's ever-abiding presence, and his ability and readiness to bless always and save them. According to Jeremiah 33:20-21, the Israelites believed in the steadfastness and inviolability of God's covenant with them. Even when they erred on their own part, they still believed God would be as firm as the laws of nature "as day and night will come at their appointed time".

The word "Tent" in Hebrew is אֹהֶל

It is the dwelling place of a deity. It can also mean a tabernacle. But the Hebrew word for the Israelite

"sacred tabernacle", is מִקְדָּשׁ : The temple

of the Lord at Jerusalem is called, in Hebrew, הַמִּקְדָּשׁ.

It may also be used to designate a large splendid building, or a palace.

The 'Ohel, was a movable habitation, made of curtains extended upon poles. As nomadic people, Israel had to provide a place for the Lord during the wilderness sojourning. The tabernacle - mishkan, was a larger structure of two parts. It was the "residence" and the "tent". The 'Ohel was a covering upon the tabernacle (Ex. 26:6). While the tent denotes the cloth roof, the tabernacle denotes the wooden walls of the sacred structure. This was quite different from the hut or booth as the tent of dwelling for the Israelites. This is תֹּהֵל (Lev. 23:34).

The temple was a building set apart exclusively for the worship of Yahweh. It was a reproduction or a development of the tabernacle. The hekal, when connected with Yahweh, connotes his dwelling place, that is, "the palace of Yahweh". To designate its sacredness, it was sometimes qualified by "Sanctuary".

The sacred tent, or the tent of meeting, the tabernacle or the temple, served as "a place" where Yahweh could meet with the congregation of Israel (Ex. 27:

21; 33:7ff., Lev. 1:1, 3; Num. 11:16ff., Deut. 31:14; II Sam. 7: 4-6, 12-13; I Kgs. 8:1-6, 17). Although Yahweh could be worshipped anywhere, especially wherever his glory was felt, yet he was not present indiscriminately in all places. He appeared at certain places for some purposes. At the tent of meeting, Yahweh held his court and passed judgment among the people.

A very significant theological issue which the tent raises, is the transcendency and unapproachableness of God. Unlike the Ark, which showed the nearness and abiding presence of God in the midst of his elect people, the tent spoke of a transcendent God, who periodically condescended to commune with his people. However, this does not show any irreconcilable contrast. Each object served different purposes. While the Ark, among other things, guided the physical movement of the people in their wanderings, the tent guided the internal affairs of their cultus, in seeking justice and in giving oracles. The presence of the ark (which later disappeared), the use of the tent, with the functions of the seers, prophets and kings, combined together to demonstrate the immanence of the transcendent God. He tabernacled with his covenant

people, and enabled them to share divine fellowship and life with him.

## B. THE ARK

### i. The Ark of the Covenant

The Tent was the desert sanctuary which was in use in Israel before the building of the Temple. According to Exodus 26:34; 40:21, the tent was designed to house the Ark of the Testimony. This "testimony" means the two tablets of stone on which the ten commandments were inscribed, as given to Moses (Ex. 31:18; Deut. 10:1-8). These, Moses put inside the ark (Ex. 25:16; 40:20). This gives explanation for calling the sanctuary, "the Tent of the Testimony". The "second law" of Deuteronomy, was also eventually placed beside "the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh" (Deut. 31:9, 26).

The sacred object of the Ark provided empirical conviction of having Yahweh in the midst of his people. He was seen at war as the God of Battle who earned Israel a global military genius. Every war was considered "holy" to the Israelites.

Over the ark was a plate of gold, of the size of the ark. It is called Kapporeth which means "propitiatory" or "mercy-seat", a significant concept of its connection with the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). The LORD appeared in cloud upon it, and before it, the high priest offered the sin offering, to make atonement for the nation.

When the Israelites left Sinai, the Ark of the Covenant went before them, and signalled when they should stop. When it moved, the people cried, "Arise, Yahweh, and let thy enemies be scattered", and let them that hate thee flee before thee" (Num. 10:35). When it rested, the people cried, "Return, O LORD, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel". When the Israelites disobeyed Moses' orders, the ark of the covenant did not leave the camp, and Israel would be defeated (Num. 14:44-45). However, when Israel sinned and did not repent, even with the ark of the covenant with the people at the battle front, they were still defeated (Josh. 7:1-12; I Sam. 4:10-11).

## ii. The Ark of Yahweh

The ark of Yahweh can also be referred to as the Ark of the Covenant. The qualification given to the ark here

differentiates it from the other two arks mentioned in the Bible, namely, the Ark of Noah (Gen. 6:14), and the Ark of Bulrushes (Ex. 2:3). It was also different from the sacred chests or arks which were in use among the other ancient peoples like the Hittites and the Babylonians. They served as symbols for their idols, and sacred relics.

In the account of the Philistine war, in I Samuel 4:4, the Ark is called "the Ark of Yahweh". From the stay of the Ark in Shiloh, this title became the new epithet. In I Chronicles 28:2, the Ark is referred to as the "foot-stool" of God. This sacred furniture of the old "Tent of Meeting", and later on, of the Tabernacle and the Temple, respectively, was referred to in Trito-Isaiah as "God's foot-stool" (Isa. 66:1). It was the throne of God on earth (Ex. 25:21, I Sam. 3:3; 4:11, 17). In this sense, both the ark and the Mercy Seat would be most probably regarded as God's throne. It is to be observed, therefore, that the throne could not have been separated from the ark. In fact, the throne was never mentioned as a distinct object from the chest. This concept is clearly emphasised in Jeremiah 3:16-17. When the ark disappeared from the midst of the people, Jeremiah offered some consolation to them that, in the



future, all Jerusalem will be called the throne of Yahweh. This suggests that the ark could be called either the throne of Yahweh or the foot-stool of Yahweh. More precisely, therefore, the ark, with the Cherubim, could be said to represent both the throne and the foot-stool of Yahweh. Thus the ark and the Mercy Seat were an inseparable unit.

Apart from the law of the covenant which the ark contained, the rod of Aaron was also kept in it (Num. 17:10). It was to serve as a sign for the rebels, "that you may make an end of their murmurings against me, lest they die". In this wise, the ark as the throne of God was no longer the throne of judgment, but of grace over the erring Israelites. This was well pronounced by the blood of the Atonement which was sprinkled upon it (Lev. 16:15).

The Ark was placed in the Holy of Holies, symbolising the holiness of God and his sanctuary. It summoned the Israelites into a unique holy fellowship with Yahweh.

The bearing of the Ark by the priests in advance of the host, (Num. 10:33; Josh. 3:8, 14) symbolised the continuous divine presence among the people. It also emphasized the holy nature of God. The companionship of the

Ark with the Israelites was so remarkable that the Philistines took it for God: "A god has come into the camp" (I Sam. 4:7). The occasional loss of the ark signified the loss of Yahweh's presence in the midst of the elect nation. The wife of Phinehas said, "The glory of Yahweh has departed from Israel!" (I Sam. 4:21), because the Ark of God had been captured.

When the Israelites eventually settled in the promised land, Solomon built and dedicated the temple of God. The ark of the covenant was then put back in the Holy of Holies by the priest (I Kgs. 8:6). When Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by the Babylonians between 598-586 B.C., the Ark also ceased to exist. In the post-exilic period, it was the strict obedience to the covenant law that was predominant. It was the basic factor by which the Jews could enjoy a unique fellowship with God.

The Israelite concept of the ark of God, or any other sacred objects, in connection with the sanctuary, or the worship of Yahweh, did not suppose an image of the divinity. Exodus 20:3-4, say: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image". Whenever there was any attempt to violate this

commandment, it was greatly resisted in their midst (Ex. 32:21ff.).

### iii. The Ark of the Tent

From all available records, it is viewed that both the Ark and the Tent were in existence in the wilderness cult. But according to Exodus 33:7-10, and Deuteronomy 10: 1-5; 31:14-15, 25-26, these two sacred objects were not connected. But again, according to the details of the making of the "tent", that is, the sanctuary, or the tabernacle and its furniture in Exodus 25-26, and 36-40, the Ark and the Tent were connected with the desert cult. It was the Tent that housed the Ark, which contained the testimony. Moreover, the Tent was the place of abode of Yahweh, the God of the Covenant. He was living right there in the midst of his chosen people.

It is necessary to find a solution to the varying views of the ancient tradition of the Israelite cultus. First, it may be suggested that perhaps the two objects belonged to different traditions, or groups of ancestors of Israel. Second, when the two groups probably came together in history, the priestly editor combined the two

objects together as reflected in the tradition of the temple of Solomon. Third, it is more probable that the two objects were originally connected with each other in the desert cult. The fact that the oldest tradition did not connect the two does not deny the possible connection. In any case, like the altar, the ark was a distinct cultic object, serving its own unique purpose.

Perhaps we should ask the sensitive question whether the ark needed a shelter or not. Was this not the primary concern of David in providing a house for Yahweh, into which the Ark was eventually brought.

... the ark of the LORD came  
 into the city of David ....  
 ... And they brought in the  
 Ark of the LORD, and set it  
 in its place, inside the tent  
 which David had pitched for it.

(II Sam. 6:16, 17)

In II Samuel 7:2, David approached Nathan, the prophet and intimated him of his desire to build a permanent house for God. "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent". Though he was not permitted by

God to build it, his Son, Solomon, achieved his sincere desire according to I Kings 8:1, 6.

Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' houses of the people of Israel, before king Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the Cherubim.

Similarly, the ark needed a shelter in the desert, and the ideal shelter for the ark in the desert circumstance, was the tent. The inseparability of the ark from the tent is further emphasised in II Samuel 7:6, where Yahweh said: "I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling".

In Joshua 3:1-6, the ark was to be carried by the Levitical priests before the company of Israel. The

sacredness of the ark was further emphasised when Joshua instructed that, a distance of about two thousand cubits should be maintained between the ark and the people of Israel. It follows therefore that such awesome sacred object could not have normally stayed among the people except in such a unique place as the tent. Even though the connection is not indicated here, it is implied.

From the above, it would be absurd to separate the ark and the tent. If we re-examine the argument of the priestly description of the desert sanctuary whereby the ark and the tent were most significantly connected, as reflected in Solomon's temple, it must be concluded therefore, that the priestly tradition had preserved an authentic record indeed. The ark and the tent were certainly different sacred objects of worship in the wilderness cultus, yet they were inseparable in the act of the desert religious act. We shall next discuss the theological concept of the ark.

### C. THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ARK

In the religious life of the Jews, the ark was as significant as the tent. But the ark was more unique in the sense that it could stand alone in the camp without the tent. This was evident at the following places: In Gilgal-Joshua 7:6; at Shechem-Joshua 8:33; at Bethel-Judges 20:27.

It is supposed that, when the ark eventually found its seat in the Holy of Holies, it shared the glory of the temple. When the temple was finally destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, in 587 B.C., the ark also shared its fate. According to II Maccabees 2:4-5, before the destruction of the temple, Prophet Jeremiah hid the ark, and saved it from destruction.

It was also in the writing that the prophet, having received an oracle, ordered that the tent and the ark should follow with him, and that he went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. And Jeremiah came and found a cave, and he brought there the tent and

the ark and the altar of incense,  
and he sealed up the entrance.

From the above passage, it is evident that the ark was hidden on Mount Nebo, Just as the death and burial of Moses were mysterious on this sacred mountain, so also, the sealing up of the ark of the covenant there was mysterious. This was quite obscure, more so that the tent was also sealed up there. Was the tent kept in the Jerusalem temple? Or was the Jerusalem temple spiritually moved to Mount Nebo? To my mind, Prophet Jeremiah was merely emphasising that, the glory of the temple moved out of the sanctuary along with the ark of the testimony, before the physical feature of the temple was destroyed.

The Ark was considered as the throne of Yahweh. To suggest that the throne of God was destroyed would amount to committing sacrilege. The Mercy Seat, which represented the divine transcendental appearance of Yahweh among his people, was placed on the ark of the covenant. It was believed to be the concrete visible sign of Yahweh's presence. In **I Samuel 4:7**, when the ark of **the LORD** arrived in the Israelite camp, the



Philistines remarked in total disarray: "A god has come into the Camp." When the ark was eventually captured from the Israelites, it was taken as the loss of God's presence. The wife of Phinehas, during a painful labour, and on the verge of death, confessed: "The glory of God has departed from Israel!" This was chiefly because the ark of God had been captured in Israel (I Sam. 4:21-22).

Similarly, when the ark was brought into the dedicated temple of Solomon, "the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD" (I Kgs. 8:11). This was the wilderness experience of the wandering Israelites. At the completion of the tabernacle in the wilderness, "the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Ex. 40:34-35). In this case, "the cloud" represented the glory of God among his people. In the wilderness journey, both the cloud and the fire, like the ark, were considered as "the glory of God". They were ways of representing the presence and the transcendence of God on earth, among his chosen people.

According to R. de Vaux,<sup>19</sup> extra Biblical documents support the ark as the throne of God. "The Egyptian Book of the Dead", mentions that a document was found under the feet of the majesty of the god Thot, and it was written by

That himself. This legendary detail is similar to the custom attested to in the historical documents of the Hittite treaties, in which it was stipulated that the text of the treaty shall be placed in a temple at the foot of an image of a god as a witness. An example of this was a letter from Ramses II, about his treaty with Hattusil which said: "The writing of the oath (pact) which I have made to the Great king, the king of Hattu lies beneath the feet of the god Teshup: the great gods are witnesses of it. The writing of the oath which the Great king, the king of Hattu, has made to me, lies beneath the feet of the god Ra: the great gods are witnesses of it".<sup>20</sup>

In the preservation of the tablets of the Mosaic Law, written by the finger of God (Ex. 31:18; Deut. 9:10), they were placed in the Ark, and put at his foot-stool in the Holy of Holies. The Decalogue was the official instrument of the treaty between Yahweh and Israel, for its preservation and uniqueness, it was put under the feet of Yahweh, that is, at his throne.

The ark was also considered as the symbol of the omnipotence of God. Divine and unequalled power was

associated with it. The Philistines felt the powerful presence of Yahweh in the ark. When they attempted to make a mockery of it, both their god, Dagon, and all the inhabitants of Ashdod and its territory were greatly afflicted. The Philistines thus remarked: "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us; for his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god." (I Sam. 5:7). When the Israelites disregarded the possible effect of the divine power of the ark, and looked into it, some seventy men of them were slain at Beth-Shemesh. (I Sam. 6: 18-19). The Hebrew Version even put the figure at fifty thousand and seventy men. In II Samuel 6:7, Uzzah, the son of Abinadab, was struck dead for touching it. According to the priestly Code, the Levites who were legally and religiously competent to bear the ark approached it only when it had been veiled by the priests. It was carried by poles which were always left on it. Any indifferent act to violate the sacredness of the ark of Yahweh was violently resisted.

If the ark was the divine abode of Yahweh, as his throne, did he physically occupy the sacred object? This question is to be discussed in the next section.

## D. THE EMPTY THRONE

It is most certain that apart from the Ancient Near East, there was sacred furniture in the temples, sanctuaries, and shrines of the ancient people all over the world, especially the Greeks, Romans and Africans. Among the furniture were empty thrones, or thrones on which only the symbols of the particular gods or goddesses were placed.

Since the religion of Israel forbade all images as idolatrous, the throne of Yahweh was empty. The ark was therefore a religious symbol, representing the seat or presence of Yahweh in the temple among his people. However, this does not suggest a physical occupation of the throne by Yahweh.

When the Prophet Isaiah claimed that he saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple, (Isa. 6:1) he was only reflecting in a vision, upon his experience of the holiness of God, and the magnificence of the holy temple in Jerusalem. There,

the divine monarch was being attended to by Seraphim as his ministers. The assertion that he saw God here did not assume a physical occupation of the throne; a claim which an average Jew would abhor. According to Hebrews 11:32ff, Isaiah was among those sawn asunder. This was during the reign of the notorious idolatrous king Manasseh in Israel,<sup>21</sup> (687-642 B.C.).

It is only with this idea that one could admit the claim that both the ark and the Cherubim represented the divine presence (Ex. 25:18; 37:7; I Kgs. 6:23-28; Ps. 80:1; Ezek. 41:18-20). In actual fact, these objects are inadequate to represent the unique divinity of Yahweh, in Israel.

During the course of the desert cult, Yahweh met Moses and spoke to him from above the Mercy Seat which stood on top of the ark (Ex. 25:22). In Exodus 25:17-22; 37:6-9, the Mercy Seat is described in detail so as to suggest that it was more important than the ark. Also, on the day of Atonement, the high priest would sprinkle blood on the Mercy-Seat, that is, the throne of Yahweh, which covered the ark. There is no distinct reference made to the role of both the ark and the cherubim here

(see Leviticus 16). One may deduce from this concept that the throne was substituted for the ark. For instance, in Post-Exilic Judaism, no new ark was built in Judea. According to I Chronicles 28:11, the "room of the Mercy Seat" was to represent the Holy of Holies. This would thereby fulfil the original role of the Ark in the most Holy Place.

Again, according to Josephus,<sup>22</sup> there was no furniture as such in the Holy of Holies of King Herod's temple. This was the situation in Israel until the time of Christ, when the veil of the Holy of Holies was torn outrightly, thereby making it possible for every worshipper to have a direct approach to God. This concept was further elaborated in the Pauline epistles to the Corinthians. In his theology of the Christian dignity, Paul considered Christians as God's temple. (I Cor. 3:16; II Cor. 6:16).

## E. THE ROD OF GOD

Another significant object of worship in the Yahweh cultus, was the rod of God. Exodus 4:2, talks of the rod of Moses which God used to perform miracles at the wilderness in Horeb. Moses was to use the same rod to perform miracles in Egypt (Ex. 4:17). It first became a serpent and was soon later restored to its normal nature. In verse 20, of the same chapter, this rod is referred to as "the rod of God". Verse 17 of this chapter presupposes that the rod was a gift from God to Moses. Although Moses had possessed the rod initially, the fact is that God now gave it a new significance and power; it was the rod of God given to Moses.

It is, however, strange to find that when Moses got to Egypt, it was the rod of Aaron that was used to carry out the assignment given to Moses with his rod in Horeb (Ex. 4:2-4, 17, 20-21; 7:8-12). The most likely explanation to this could be, that, since it was Yahweh also who called Aaron to assist Moses, the rod of God which Moses brought could be given to Aaron to perform the miracle. Normally, since the Hebrews were pastoral agrarians, Aaron

was also entitled to a rod, and God could have granted his rod such a magical power. However, it was emphatically mentioned that the same rod which was used in Horeb was to be used in Egypt. "And you shall take in your hand this rod, with which you shall do the signs" (Ex. 4:17). God also said: "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do, before Pharaoh all the miracles which I have put in your power" (Ex. 4:21). Aaron, most likely, may have acted on behalf of Moses in accordance with Exodus 4:14-16, 28ff.

The rod of God, held by Moses and Aaron was very significant to the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings. At Massah and Meribah, in Rephidim, the same rod was used to provide water for the murmuring people. This same rod must have been raised up in victory during the Israelite battle with the Amalekites in Rephidim. It was an emblem of victory connected with the altar which Moses built to the Lord after the battle (Ex. 17:15-16). The victory was thought of as the power of Yahweh, which was effectively present in his rod held up by Moses who was supported by Aaron and Hur on both sides. At the waters of Meribah, the rod of God was used as a symbol



of God's authority and power to provide water for the grumbling congregation (Num. 20:8ff.). The rod of God was all along connected with the deliverance and providence of God for his covenant people.

When Israel sinned against God in the wilderness, between Mount Hor and Edom, many of them were bitten to death by fiery serpents (Num. 21:6-9). Moses was called upon by the Israelites to pray for them for forgiveness. The Lord, therefore, ordered Moses to set up a fiery serpent of bronze on a pole, to be gazed at by any one who was bitten by the serpent, for survival. This was made in a form of snake-staff, or rod. The serpent-staff was not very significant in the later period. Though it was not originally meant to introduce idolatry, the Israelites preserved it. Later on, they burned incense to it in Jerusalem and called it Nehushtan.<sup>23</sup>

The last topic to discuss under the sacred objects of the covenant is "the sacred lots", namely, the sacred lot of Urim and Thummim, and the Ephod and Teraphim.

## F. THE SACRED LOTS

i. The Sacred Lot of Urim and Thummim

The sacred lot of Urim and Thummim was the technical means of inquiring the will of God. The two objects were most probably stones, placed in the breastplate of the high priest: by which he ascertained the will of God in any important matter affecting the nation (Ex. 28:30; Lev. 8:8).

The sacred lot served as a symbol of the high priest's authority to seek the counsel of Yahweh; to reveal the will of God to him through inner-illumination. It was also, an oracle by lot. It was cast like dice similar to the manipulation of the Ifa Oracle<sup>24</sup> by the traditional priest in Africa. The procedure of the use of the sacred lot is found in I Samuel 14:40ff. The parties in dispute would stand apart, and the lot be cast. While Urim, which technically meant "light", would be asked to appear on the side of one of the parties, Thummim, which meant "perfection" (truth), was to appear on the other side. It may be cast more than once before the final clue was got. The manner of the fall of Urim and Thummim somehow revealed the Lord's will. Deuteronomy 33:8,

describes the sacred lot as the special prerogative of the Levitical priest to interpret the casting of the objects. For more information on the sacred lot, see Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8; I Samuel 10:19-22; 14:37-42; Nehemiah 7:65.

#### ii (a) The Ephod

Like the Urim and Thummim, the Ephod was another sacred lot which had various interpretations. It could be the priestly garment with a pocket for holding the lots. Most probably, the Ephod was used along with Urim and Thummim.

The Ephod could also be said to be a means of divination by the priest. But the sources of these means of divination are not certain. However, the Canaanite idolatrous way of inquiring from their gods might have had some impact upon the Israelites. The use of these oracles was certainly common among the people of the Ancient Near East. Certainly, the Israelites must have been influenced by this cult. This does not mean that the use of Urim and Thummim, and the Ephod and Teraphim was idolatry; rather, it was simply a technical device for inquiring the will of

God. The practice of inquiring through oracles or sacred lots did not manifest any lack of faith whatever (see Genesis 25:22; I Samuel 2:18; 2:28; Acts 1:26). The covenant law prohibited the practice of divination in Israel (see Leviticus 19:26; Deuteronomy 18:10; II Kings 17:17-18; Jeremiah 27:9; 29:8-9; cf. Numbers 22:7; Ezekiel 21:21).

The use of these sacred lots in Israel was merely to establish the truth of the circumstance. It also aided the consolidation of the Israelite faith. The lots were used in the sanctuary along with the Ark and its contents to serve as symbols of the idea of the divine presence and Lordship of Yahweh. The Israelites must then accept the leadership of the priests and all their divine functions including the casting of sacred lots.

The Ephod could also appear as an apron worn upon the priestly garment to hold the oracle. It was also regarded as the garment for the deity, and a distinctive garment of the priests who represented the deity before the people. Therefore, it may be said that the Ephod was also regarded as a garment worn by those who served Yahweh in the temple.

Whatever the sources, or influence of the use of the sacred lots, the answers given by them were attributed to divine revelation by Yahweh, the God of Israel.

It is pertinent to conclude that the use of the Ephod by the Israelites in the Yahweh cultus was justifiable in the circumstances. Just as the ark was necessary to accompany the host of Israel to assure victory at battles; and sacrifice was a cultic necessity usually before or after military engagements, so also the use of Ephod, and the sacred lots at large, confirmed the Israelite faith in the nature of the covenant God, as the God of justice, truth, peace and right guidance, and a reliable counsellor.

(b) The Teraphim:

The Teraphim were tutelary personal household gods, giving response to consulters. They were figurines or images in human form. They were not necessarily cultic. Traditionally, Rachel's theft of Laban's teraphim (Gen. 31: 34), is much better understood in the light of apparently possessing the leadership of the family. In the case of a

married daughter, her husband was assured of the right to the property of her father, as legitimate members of the family. Since Laban evidently had sons of his own, when Jacob left Haran (with Leah and Rachel) for Canaan, only those sons of Laban left behind, had the right to their father's gods. The theft of Rachel was a serious offence (Gen. 31:19, 30, 35), aimed at preserving for her husband the first title to her father's estate.

But in Judges 17:5-13, Micah, the Ephraimite installed an ephod and teraphim in his shrine as cultic objects; though they were not idols. They were put there for securing an oracle. The fact that it was put under the function of a Levitical priest shows that it was not a divination which was considered idolatry in Israel (cf. I Samuel 15:23). Unlike the Israelites, according to Ezekiel 21:21, the Babylonian king oracularly used teraphim quite differently from divination.

When the ark eventually settled in the sanctuary, these sacred objects became very insignificant, Urim and Thummim, for instance, became mere items of the priestly regalia. They were reserved for the High Priest only.

This final stage of the sacred objects shows that Israel had no original aim to include these sacred objects to pollute the covenant cultus.

During the reform of king Hezekiah, and the Deuteronomic reform of King Josiah, the sacred stones, pillars, and images connected with Yahweh's cult were condemned and destroyed respectively. The erection of such objects was most probably encouraged by Manasseh, like the bull image introduced by Jeroboam I, at the royal sanctuaries in Bethel and Dan (I Kgs. 12).

King Josiah also abolished the teraphim (II Kgs. 23: 34), along with the mediums, the wizards, and the idols, as abominations in Judah (see I Samuel 28:3-7; Hosea 3:4; Zechariah 10:2). To represent Yahweh with "sacred objects" was not in conformity with the covenant obligations. Yahweh's cultus must therefore be void of any imagery. Undoubtedly, the inclusion of these images in the covenant cultus was as a result of the Canaanite influence, as earlier on suggested. Yet, because it did not conform with both primitive Yahwism and Judaism, (and the later christianity), it was thus strongly resisted. Though like the bull image introduced by Jeroboam I, most of these

sacred objects were not instances of true images of Yahweh, but only the symbolic indications of the divine presence. Yahweh could not be represented by any empiric object. There is nowhere in the Old Testament where Yahweh is represented by any image or pictorial object. When Aaron attempted it with the Golden Calf, it was vehemently resisted. Aaron said: "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" These gods, including the Golden Calf, were burnt to ashes, and the idolatrous Israelites were made to drink their gods. The unrepentant Israelites were all slain (Ex. 32).

Both Hezekiah and Josiah destroyed all the pictorial representations of Yahweh. (II Kgs. 18:1ff., 23). This was because the objects were considered as essentially idols, which could not take the place of Yahweh. They were refused to be incorporated into Yahweh cultus, and thereby summarily resisted. Earlier on, Jehu had made a bold attempt to wipe out idolatry in Israel. All the idol worshippers were destroyed. He burnt the house of Baal and destroyed its pillar (II Kgs. 10:18-28). Yahweh was both transcendent and immanent. He was near all the time to commune with his elect. He needed no image representa-



tion.

Chapter four which follows is very crucial in the Old Testament theology of the covenant. It is expedient at this juncture to examine the nature of God who contracted a treaty with Israel. How did Israel understand the divine nature of the covenant God? The ultimate purpose of the election was to redeem mankind through Israel as a worthy representative of God on earth. The extent to which Israel justified this privilege as a holy nation is also to be discussed in the following chapter.

## 1. NOTES TO CHAPTER III

## THE STATUTES OF THE COVENANT

1. C.C. Forman, Editor "The Book of the Covenant"  
R.H. Pfeiffer, Theology, LV, No. 473, pp. 410ff.
2. J. Morgenstern, "Literary history of the Book of  
the Covenant", Journal of Biblical Literature,  
LXII, pp. 274ff. Henceforth cited as JBL.
3. Albrecht Alt, "The Origin of Israelite Law",  
Essays on Old Testament History and Religion,  
pp. 75ff. Henceforth cited as OTHR.
4. In order to facilitate smooth reckoning and under-  
standing of the Hebrew periods mentioned in this  
research, the following Hebrew calendar is given.  
According to M.F. Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary,  
pp. 163ff., Israel first used a solar calendar, and  
later a combination of both solar and lunar, which  
was the usual practice in the Ancient Near East,  
especially among the Babylonians. While the solar has  
365 days in a year, the lunar calendar has 354 days.  
Undoubtedly, the Hebrews based their calendar  
predominantly on the Babylonian style, which was  
restricted to civil and historical records.

## HEBREW CALENDAR

NO	H E B R E W	REFERENCE	ENGLISH EQUIVALENCE	DAYS	SIGNIFICANCE
1.	A'bib or Nisan	Nehemiah 2:1	March-April	30	7th of civil year (sacred) spring
2.	Zif or Ijar/Iyyar.	-	April-May	29	8th " " " summer
3.	Sivan	Esther 8:9	May-June	30	9th " " "
4.	Tam' muz	-	June-July	29	10th " " " (Hot season)
5.	' Ab	-	July-August	30	11th " " " Fruitful month
6.	E' lul	Nehemiah 6:15	August-September	29	12th " " " Intense heat and much lightning.
7.	Eth'anim or Fis'ri	-	Sept.-October	30	1st " " " Seed time.
8.	Bul or Marchesh-Van	-	Oct.-November	29	2nd " " "
9.	Chis'leu	Zechariah 7:1 Nehemiah 1:1	Nov.-December	30	3rd " " " Winter begins
10.	Te'beth	Esther 2:16	Dec.-January	29	4th " " " Mid-winter
11.	She'bat or Se'bat	Zechariah 1:7	Jan.-February	30	5th " " " Winter
12.	A'dar	Esther 3:7, 13; 8:12; 9:1 Ezr. 6:15	Feb.-March	29	6th " " " Cold and rainy season or spring

5. J.L. McKenzie, "knowledge of God in Hosea",  
JBL, LXXIV, Part 1, pp. 22ff.; G.W.  
 Buchanan, "The Old Testament meaning of  
 the knowledge of Good and Evil",  
JBL, LXXV, pp. 114ff.
6. G.R. Driver, "Code of Hammurabi", The Encyclopaedia  
 Americana, VI, International Edition, pp. 666f.
7. According to Dickson, this was perhaps to make a  
 provision for manumission in the ancient Jewish Law  
 (Ex. 21:2; Deut. 15:12f). Similarly, in accordance  
 with the ancient custom, Abraham adopted Eliezer,  
 son of a slave girl, before the birth of Ishmael and  
 Isaac (Gen. 15:1-3). K.A. Dickson, "The Old  
 Testament and African Theology" Ghana Bulletin of  
 Theology, IV, No. 4, pp. 31ff. Henceforth cited  
 as GBT.
8. G.R. Driver, Op.Cit., pp. 666f.
9. Sanhedrin: It is from the Greek συνεδριον :  
 which means: a council or an assembly session. It  
 was the highest Jewish tribunal during the Greek and  
 Roman periods. It developed from the aristocratic

council of elders which was presided over by the hereditary high priest. The Sanhedrin was composed of seventy members. It included tribal or family heads, chief priests, scribes as the legal advisers, Pharisees and Sadducees. It was traced back to the college of seventy elders appointed by Moses in the wilderness (See Num. 11:16-17, 25; Mk. 14:55; Lk. 22:66; Acts 4:5f., 9:2; 22:5; 26:12).

10. See also W. Eichrodt, The Theology of the Old Testament, (TOT) I, p. 128.
11. R. S. Paul, The Atonement and the Sacrament, pp. 18f.

#### THE INSTRUMENTS OF THE COVENANT

12. According to I Samuel 10:5-13, there was some band of prophets directly connected with the state politics. Their stay very close to the garrison of the Philistines, was definitely to stir up the Israelites in holy war against their foes. These ecstatic prophets, or the cultic prophets, i.e. those stationed at the local sanctuaries with cultic priests (Amos 7:10-13), are quite different from the writing or classical prophet, such as

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos etc. For further details, see B. W. Anderson, The Living Word of the Old Testament 3rd edition, London: Longman. pp. 228-232.

13. R. C. Dentan, Editor. The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East. J. Obermann & Co., The Journal of Theological Studies, V, Part 2, p. 261. Henceforth cited as JTS.
14. N. H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament, pp. 122f.
15. W. F. Lofthouse, "Hen and Hased in the Old Testament", Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, L1 pp. 29ff.
16. Roland de Vaux, Ancient Israel: Its life and Institutions, (Ancient Israel) p. 346.
17. i. Ark: "Ark of the Covenant", was otherwise referred to as "the ark of the testimony", or "the chest of the covenant". It contained the tables of the law, resting in the tabernacle or temple. It went before Israel in the wilderness (Number. 10:33).
- ii. Urim and Thummim: They were objects representing "light" and "perfection" (truth),

though these objects are not specifically described. For detailed discussion on these sacred objects, see chapter four, section 3, F.

18. F. Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, pp. 379ff.
19. R. de Vaux, Ancient Israel, p. 301.
20. Ibid.
21. M.F. Unger, op. cit., p. 534.
22. R. de Vaux, Ancient Israel, pp. 300ff. (as quoted by R. de Vaux).
23. **Nehushtan:** It is the name given to the serpent of brass surviving from the time of Moses. It was destroyed by King Hezekiah during his reforms, because the Israelites had been making it an object of worship, contrary to the covenant Law (II Kgs. 18:4; Ex. 20:4-5).
24. **Ifa Oracle:**  
Ifa is a god of divination. Ifa oracle is a means by which the deity is consulted for information and guidance among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, though oracular divination is common to Africans in general. Traditionally, no civic undertaking could be embarked upon

without the consultation of the oracular god. Even recently, in the Nigerian political arena, the Ifa oracle was consulted in Ogun State by the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). This was in order to ascertain the rightful candidate to seek the gubernatorial post in the forth-coming 1983 General Elections.

Though *Osanyin* is the god of healing, by means of use of medicine, yet it was also consulted by the Yoruba for divination.



## CHAPTER IV

THE NATURE OF THE COVENANT GOD, AND  
COVENANT AS A DOCTRINE OF REDEMPTION

## 1. THE NATURE OF THE COVENANT GOD

The doctrine of Israel's election as Yahweh's nation is fundamentally based upon the grace of God; apart from this, there would have been no covenant. The loving grace of God was shown in the election promises and saving acts throughout Israelite history. Along with this, however, as we have discussed earlier, the sense of law and legal obligation were given concrete form and theological significance in the covenant making. The Israelites were to respond with perfect obedience, as a responsible party to the sacred treaty, as they had promised.

The giving of the law within the expression of God's grace was an indication that, whatever the depth of the Israelite faith and righteousness, this could not be compared with the righteousness of God. The sacred covenant provided the norms of right and wrong to enable the Israelites to live a mutual life of active faith with God. The violation of this may lead to the dissolution of the covenant. It would in effect lead to the disintegration of the society.

Let us now examine the nature of Yahweh.

A. Yahweh as an Ethical Being

It is necessary to consider here, the date at which Israel became conscious of Yahweh as an absolutely ethical Being. Could it be during the prophecy of the eighth century prophets or sometime earlier than that? Truly, while we owe the highest and fullest ideas of the moral personality of Yahweh to their prophetic oracles, their work was not without preparation. They should not be seen in isolation, because their work did not emerge from a vacuum. Such prophets as Elijah and Nathan in fact made Israel conscious of the uniqueness of Yahweh. He was just and fair in all his ways. So also, Moses, the first prophet of Israel gave Israel the primary concept of Yahweh as a righteous God. The deity was faithful to his words. In fact, right from the earliest history of Israel in close contact with Yahweh, the relationship had been all along moral as well as religious.

The subsequent history of Israel from her adoption, became more intelligible as everything was interpreted on the basis of its relationship to the Sinai covenant. It was on this covenant that the national faith of Israel was formally ratified and established. As hitherto experienced,

Yahweh's covenant with Israel became as steadfast as what we call the laws of nature. He ever remained faithful to Israel.

B. Yahweh as a Personal Being

The Israelites understood the God who made a covenant with them as a personal God. This was the early concept of the chosen people about the character of the divine name "Yahweh". This divine name constituted a guarantee of the ever-presence of the sovereign God, whose free gift of grace would be enjoyed continuously. Yahweh, the God of the covenant was a personal God to them. He could be approached anywhere at all times. His fellowship was enjoyed all along. He could be called upon for aid whenever required, especially at the consecrated places. The revelation of his personal name was a unique access by which worshippers were confident of being in close contact with Yahweh (Ex. 3:13-15).

According to the Israelite custom, name was not simply an identity, but a description in the closest possible way with the person's personality character or existence. Examples of this abound in the Old Testament.

For instance, in Genesis 17:5, "Abram" means: "exalted father", while "Abraham" means: "father of a multitude". Verse 19 of the same chapter gives the meaning of "Isaac" as "he laughs". "Gershom" in Exodus 2:22, is said to mean, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land". "Eliazar" means "God is my help" i.e., "Eli" - my God, "ezer" - help. Interestingly enough, the Egyptians had the same custom. When Pharaoh's daughter adopted Moses, she named him thus, meaning, "Because I drew him out of water".<sup>1</sup> This is also true of the Nigerian names. For instance, "Olorunfemi" is given to a child, among the Yoruba ethnic group, to express parents' gratitude to God, and their appreciation of God's love towards them for the gift of the child. Among the Ibo ethnic group, God is called "Chineke". This means "One who creates". This is similar to the practice of the Warri and Itshẹkiri people of the Bendel State who call God "Oritshe" or "Orişẹ", meaning "The source of beings", "The Origin", or "The creator of all things". "Soko" is the name given to God by the Nupe of Niger State. This simply means, "The Great or Big One". The Hausa call God "Ubangiji" to mean "The powerful One", or "The Almighty".

The Yoruba names of "Olurun" and "Olodumare" are used to denote the ownership of heaven of the Universe, that is, "One who owns heaven", or "One who owns the terrestrial world". This is close in meaning to the English name "God Almighty". Therefore, the knowledge of the name or personality of Yahweh was more than a means of distinguishing a person, but also a means of strengthening the relationship with him. Thus, the spiritual and personal activity of Yahweh is comprehended in the divine name. However, this does not involve any physical interpretation whatever.

A number of passages in the Old Testament point to a number of names the early people of Israel used of God (Ex. 3:13-15, 6:2-3; Gen. 33:20; 28:19; Ezek. 28). An examination of these passages and others will provide us with the picture of what names the people called Yahweh. They included "E<sup>l</sup>; 'E<sup>l</sup>ōh<sup>im</sup>, YHWH. 'E<sup>l</sup>: The name 'E<sup>l</sup> and its epithets were used widely in the patriarchal narratives while they were sparingly used in other parts of the Old Testament.

A. Alt, in an article called, "The God of the fathers"<sup>2</sup>, studied the following epithet and made these conclusions. He admitted that 'E<sup>l</sup> had some relationship with the Canaanite gods. He however argued that the editor responsible for the tradition merely chose the name of a numen (god) of a local Palestinian Shrine, removed all the dirt from it and substituted it for the name of the God of the Fathers. Strangely enough, however, he then argued that the God of the Fathers was without personal name and cult places.

Since the dawn of intensive activity in archaeology, a number of useful Ugaritic texts and Akkadian texts have been discovered on this subject. These texts have revealed the place, character and position of 'E<sup>l</sup> in the Canaanite and Mesopotamian pantheon. A comparison of the concepts of 'E<sup>l</sup> and its epithets in both these ancient documents and the biblical texts, have revealed the similarities of the idea attached to 'E<sup>l</sup> contrary to the conclusions arrived at by Alt.

According to M.E. Andrew<sup>3</sup>, the Archaeological discovery of the Ras Shamra<sup>4</sup> (Ugaritic) texts has

thrown a great light on the similarities between the two religions. But the epithets accorded 'Ēl in the Old Testament show vividly that the Israelites' concept of Yahweh as the Creator and the Almighty God, was unique. In other words, God was already known fully to his elect people before their settlement in Canaan. The problem of their apostasy was quite a different matter altogether. Even when it is admitted that some elements of Canaanite religion were adopted by the Yahwists, yet, their modification was to be seen in the light of Paul's preaching at Athens (Acts 17:23), as revealing "the Unknown God", to the Canaanites from the level of the understanding of their deity. He was the Most High and the Almighty. This shows that while 'Ēl may stand alone, so also the epithets could stand alone. In the light of these arguments, Yahweh was perfectly acknowledged before the Covenant people came in direct contact with the influence of Baal-worship. For instance, in Exodus 3:13ff., Moses did not introduce a new God to the Israelites, but simply calling him by his personal name. He was the same God of the Patriarchs.

'El in the Canaanite and Mesopotamian pantheon was the chief divinity. He was also the God par excellence. Even though the name 'El was rarely used in the bible, the Ancient East ideas, virtues, or attributes given to 'El did not escape utilization by the Old Testament religion. That is, the character of 'El was revealed in part by its epithets. 'El was called "father", "Creator", and "King" (Gen. 14:18-19). So, 'El was the Creator-God, and "qōnē Sāmayīm wa-'āres", applied exclusively to him, i.e., "Creator of heaven and earth".



When the priest blessed Israel, or laid hands upon people; or when the prophets uttered their oracles all in the name of Yahweh, these were more than the mere expression of a wish. It was a vivid demonstration of a convinced faith in the powerful and ever active divine person. This does not suggest that Israel believed in the magical efficacy of the divine name; hence the misuse of the divine name as in the contemporary society was forbidden. While Israel was allowed a free use of the divine name in worship to communicate with him, yet, in Exodus 20:7, Israel was greatly warned not to misuse the divine name. Serious punishment was to be meted out to any such culprit. "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain".

Throughout the Old Testament. this warning was strictly observed. When in the New Testament also, Simon the magician, in Acts 8:12, 24, wanted to purchase the gift of the Holy Spirit from Peter in

Samaria, in order to uplift his magical prowess and influence, in the name of Jesus, he was immediately condemned along with his money.

The fact that Israel was convinced of the personality of Yahweh, and his presence felt in concrete active history, made her to call upon the divine name in worship. The expression "to call on the name of Yahweh", simply means "to pray". This shows that Israel was quite certain that the covenant God, with whom she dealt was a personal divine Being. He revealed and manifested himself to her, in fellowship.

All the names discussed above, pointed to the personal character of God. He was directly involved in regulating the affairs of personal beings, that is, his worshippers. He influenced their daily lives, especially in social and cultic activities, and their conduct of wars. For instance, despite the fact that Saul had been rejected by God, and God's spirit taken away from him, when he wanted to execute a war against the Philistines, he still considered it expedient to inquire of the LORD (I Sam. 15:26; 16:14; 28:6).

God's ultimate will was to be in constant fellowship with a human community. This emphasises the claim with all conviction that he is a personal God who could reason and act like human beings; after all, God created man in his own image, after his likeness. The Living Bible specifically paraphrases it thus:

So God made man like his Maker,  
Like God did God make man.

(Gen.1:27)

God was a conscious life-force. It was obviously established that by the reality of the presence of the divine Being in the whole affairs of human beings, the existence of God is quite certain and unshakably retained throughout the life-history of Israel.

The personal God of Israel was believed to be immanent, and this seemed to overshadow his transcendent nature (though they strongly believed both in his immanence and transcendence). Individual parts of the human body were attributed to the person of God, such as eyes, hands, ears (I Sam. 5:11; Gen. 3:8; Amos 1:2). These descriptions were true of the manner in which animism speaks of its personified natural forces. Truly, the patriarchs were greatly influenced by the Ancient Near East, and Canaan idolatry, but their experience of Yahweh was unique. Even when it is argued that the Old Testament imitated this concept,

it only shows that the foundation of the Israelite faith was not based on the spiritual or mystic nature of God, but on his personhood. Their faith was based on concrete and not vague experience.

C. The Relationship Between Yahweh and Baal (Ba'al).

Baal was a common name for god among the Phoenicians. It was the name for their chief male god. The word literally means "Lord", "Master". The word was also used of the master and owner of a house (Jug. 19:22); a land-owner (Job 31:39); and an owner of cattle (Ex.21:28; Isa. 1:3). The word was often used separately or as a prefix or suffix to names of men and towns, e.g. Baal (I Chr.8:30;9:36); Jerubaal (Jug. 7: 1); Eshbaal, Meribaa; (IChr. 3 33f; 9:40); Baal-gad; Baal - hamen (Josh . 11:17; Song of Solomon 8:11); and Baal-Meon (Num. 32:38).

Baal was the son of 'Ēl, the father of the gods and the head of the Canaanite pantheon. He was also designated as the son of Dagon, the Mesopotamian and Philistines' deity (I Sam. 5: 2). He was associated with the agricultural cult. As the farm god, he gave increase to family and field, flocks and herds. He was also identified with the storm-god, Hadad. The inhabitants of Canaan were addicted to Baal worship, which was conducted by priests in temples, fields and particularly hilltops, called "high places". The cult included animal sacrifice and ritualistic meals.

We have shown how there was a continuous relationship between Yahweh and 'El, and how Yahweh, the God of Israel took over a number of the significant attributes of the Canaanite 'El. Similarly, Yahwism owed some features to the myths of Baal. In the earliest poetic sources in the Bible, the language depicting Yahweh as a divine warrior, was borrowed almost directly from the Canaanite description of the theophany of Baal as a storm god. He was the Lord of the storm cloud or the Lord of the Nimbus. He was usually identified with activities connected with lightning and thunder. His throne was usually on the mountain. He was the dreadful warrior before whom all nature blanched and died. On the other hand, Baal was the god whose influence brought the most wanted rain which made the desert bloom.

Psalm 29, gives a vivid example of the Canaanite picture of Baal as the divine warrior, on the march to battle, bearing his terrible weapon - the thunder-bolt and wind. He drove his fiery cloud and chariot against his enemies. He thundered upon many waters and broke the cedars of Lebanon. His voice shook the wilderness and flashed forth flames of fire. His wrath was reflected in nature. To this end, the mountains shattered and the heavens collapsed at a glance.

The above features, undoubtedly, were equally true of the elements common to Yahwism. But whether these elements were not common to the Israelites before they came in direct contact with the Canaanite cult is very controversial. However, according to M.E. Andrew<sup>5</sup>,

there was a very great conflict between the two religions.

They were complete opposites, at least as far as their official manifestations were concerned. He argued that it was not true that the Israelite religion adopted some elements of the Canaanite religion. It will be erroneous also to suggest that Israel adopted some features of Baal who was associated with the fertility cult which was prevalent in Canaan and Phoenicia. His view was similar to that of Otto Eissfeldt<sup>6</sup> who claimed that the ninth Century B.C. prophets brought into limelight, the conflict between Yahweh and Baal. By that time, Yahwism had adopted or absorbed so much of Baalism that it was in danger of becoming an ordinary member of the Canaanite pantheon. The battle against syncretism and Baalism was led, mounted and fought rigorously by the Prophet Elijah (I Kgs. 18-19). The drama reached its climax on Mounts Carmel and Sinai (Horeb). The uniqueness and supremacy of Yahwism over Baalism was proved and established on Mount Carmel. Also, Sinai was raptured by storm—great and strong wind, earthquake, and fire. These were the principal marks of the theophany of the storm god. But Yahweh refused to manifest himself to Elijah through such idolatrous theophany:

And behold, the Lord passed by,  
 and a great and strong wind rent  
 the mountain, and broke in pieces  
 the rocks before the Lord, but  
 the Lord was not in the wind;  
 and after the wind an earthquake,  
 but the Lord was not in the earthquake;  
 and after the earthquake a fire,  
 but the Lord was not in the fire;  
 and after the fire a still small voice.

(1 Kgs. 19:11-12).

Thus Yahweh rejected the thunderous voice of Baal, and introduced a new form of appearance to his worshippers, in "a Still Small Voice", i.e., in Hebrew qōl dēmāmā daqqā - "a thin Whisper of Sound". The abrupt refusal of Yahweh to appear in the traditional theophany at Sinai marked the beginning of a new era in the mode of his self disclosure. This seems to be how Elijah and his ancient prophetic school viewed Yahweh. Therefore while there may be some positive relationship between the two religions, there were also distinctive differences.

## 2. THE COVENANT AS A DOCTRINE OF REDEMPTION

### A. The Religious and Saving Consciousness of Israel

The constitution of Israel, as we have noted was strictly regarded as religious, and Israel as a state was therefore considered as exclusively a religious community. Her mode of government was primarily referred to as theocracy, that is, the Kingdom of God. When it changed to monarchy it was still considered as a religious state governed by God through the monarch rather than the priest.

Right from the very cradle of Israel's existence, there has been a religious significance attached to every aspect of her history, with a continuous relationship with Yahweh. How she left Canaan for settlement in Egypt, her migration or Exodus from Egypt through the wilderness to a final settlement in Canaan, her deportation to the exile and the eventual return to Judea, and her continuous existence thereafter, all demonstrate her uniqueness as a religious state directly governed by Yahweh. This fundamental fact has to be borne in mind in order to make any meaningful interpretation of the Israelites' history and religious awareness.



The external form of Israel made her unique position manifest in the world. God's dealings with Israel made her more conscious of her significant place among the nations of the world; and consequently she understood herself as a community of God. Israel was conscious of this honour done to her, therefore, her social and civil life was ultimately embraced under her religious life. It is a fact, of course, that at this point in time, almost all nations had their own respective national gods and religions (Mic. 4:5). Usually, religion among the Semitic people was national. Such religion was not monotheistic but rather monolatry, that is, particularism. The uniqueness of Israel did not only lie in the fact that her religion was to be monotheistic, but that she had a sense of mission to give to the nations of the world. It was the idea of a saved state, to be a religious model for the nations of the world to strive after. This was to enable all the religions of the world to come together into a unique form under the only recognized God of the universe.

The history of Israel was interpreted by their prophets. Emphasis was placed on the uniqueness of the nation among nations, because of her special bond with

Yahweh. He was greater than all other national deities, and as such his religion was supreme. He must be conceived as the only one God to be worshipped. All other lesser gods were but nothing before him. They must be totally ignored by Israel as non-existent. This made the religion of Yahweh monotheistic. But the question must be asked, whether Israel knew the particular future reference of their faith to be universalistic or otherwise. Was it to be as particular as other nations' individual religions? At the early stage of Israel's religious consciousness, she was exclusively particularistic. Yahweh was considered as their own private God, while they were his own people. The concept of the Mosaic treaty was basically based on this religious awareness, which most probably developed out of Israel's experience during her wanderings among the Semitic peoples. Yahwism was therefore particularistic at this stage on the basis of God's revelation of himself to Israel.

Whatever the nature of national faith was primarily, one thing is certain, that Israel was aware of her position as a people of the grace of God to enjoy his salvation. This fundamental redemptive idea was constantly

expressed by the prophets of Yahweh. This was the centre of the whole compact with Yahweh. Other redemptive ideas therefore arose from the analysis of the covenant framework, just as the true life experience of the people made the covenant relationship meaningful.

Yahweh, as the initiator of the covenant sustained it at all costs. The covenant, it may be said, was just the bringing into the consciousness of Israel, the significance of Yahweh's act of choosing them, and redeeming them out of bondage in Egypt. Yahweh, being a righteous God, was faithful to the covenant obligations throughout. The justice and righteousness of Yahweh were emphasised by the ethical prophets to further interpret the covenant as a saving theology. Salvation was due to Israel as a chosen people of Yahweh, the covenant God, who was righteous to fulfil his obligations to the last. Israel must be redeemed by all means. Upon this unique character of God, Israel built her hopes of salvation.

Israel was seen as a people, a nation, and a chosen race. In brief, she was dealt with as a unit. The covenant was made with her as a group and not as individuals. This concept can rightly be said to have been established

during the Exodus episode. Israel was delivered as a body. Henceforth, the people regarded themselves as a body, united together for a singular purpose by the unparalleled God. From now on both Yahweh and Israel had mutual right with each other. He was to protect, guide and instruct his people in all things always. The prophet Amos, in 2:9-10, claimed that it was Yahweh who gave victory to Israel over her enemies, and led the people throughout their wanderings. Amos 2:11; and Judges 7:18, went further to claim that God, in divine intervention gave Israel victory all along.

To talk of the special relationship between Yahweh and Israel does not mean that he was not the God of all other peoples of the world, but rather, his relationship with Israel was unique and purposeful. Amos 3:2, says: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth". The Living Bible renders the verse thus: "Of all the peoples of the earth, I have chosen you alone". Israel was to be outstanding among the nations, just as Yahweh was outstanding among the gods of the nations of the earth. Thus the verse concludes: "That is why I must punish you the more for all your sins".

On the security of the nation, Israel was taught to exercise strong faith in the covenant promises of Yahweh to defend her and lead her to success. She was not to rely on the horses and fenced cities like the other nations but rather on Yahweh. She should not rely on the chariots of Egypt either (Hos. 1:7, 8:14; II Kgs. 18:21; Isa. 30:1-7; 31:1; 36:5-6, 9-10). This concept also contributed to the particularistic outlook of the Israelite faith. The moral and religious significance of the covenant relationship was that Yahweh belonged to them, and they should be responsible to him in all aspects of their existence, be it political, military, social, economic or religious. This faith lingered on among the Israelites up to the New Testament. When the disciples requested the Lord to teach them how to pray, Jesus responded by saying, "when you pray, say: "Our Father" or "Father" (Matt. 7:9; Lk. 11:1-2). The individuals saw Yahweh as "their God". The reason for this may be simply because Israel was chosen as a people, not as individuals. All the patriarchs, for instance, represented their generations and not individual personalities. Individuals were recognized only within the collective personality. When an individual broke the

covenant law, or sinned, as earlier on discussed, in some cases it was both the individual and the whole nation that suffered. Where the whole nation did not suffer, the repercussion of the sin committed may be suffered by the future generations of either the sinner alone or the whole nation. Exodus 20:5, says: "And when I punish people for their sins, the punishment continues upon the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of those who hate me." (LB)

However, the doctrine of individualism came up very late in the development and matured understanding of the bond relationship. This has been well illustrated in the New covenant concept of Jeremiah. As in Ezekiel, the individual was to bear the consequences of the sins committed. I still believe, of course, that if not directly, the society would somehow be affected by the suffering of such individuals, at least, indirectly. According to Saint Paul in I Corinthians 12:26, if one member of the body suffers, all other members would suffer as well.

A crucial reason why the doctrine of individualism was

not championed in the Old Testament might be due to the little prominence given to the idea of personal survival or immortality. The prophets spoke of the immortality of the nation and not of individuals. For instance, the prophet Isaiah emphasized the inviolability of Jerusalem as representing the kingdom of Israel (Isa. 26:19; Dan 12:2-3; Isa. 11:9; 25:6-8; 24:23). This should not baffle us because Yahweh did not make any agreement with individuals, but a corporate body, the nation. The covenant relationship was basically national as the Exodus was national,<sup>7</sup> and consequently, the individuals did not have personal consciousness of the relationship. When the concept of individualism was later emphasized, this was not done in isolation but within the context of the national body.

It has been noted that the relationship between Yahweh and Israel was basically on the ground of morality and religion, and not on politics. The act of the rite of circumcision was the seal of the covenant which described the putting off of the natural life of the people, and the taking up of the new nature. The redemption of the nation with blood, shed at circumcision, and illustrated in the

attempted sacrifice of Isaac, was perfectly demonstrated in the shed blood of the Passover-Paschal sacrifice. John the Evangelist, treated the crucifixion as occurring at the time of the Passover. The numerous lambs were prepared for sacrificial offering, so also, Christ, the Lamb of God offered himself a ransom, the Paschal lamb for many. John says: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29; see also Genesis 22:7; Exodus 12:3; Gen. 22:8). The redemption of the nation was universal.

Israel belonged to Yahweh corporately to the extent that no single Israelite could possess another Israelite. Slavery of an Israelite by a co-Israelite was seriously forbidden in Israel. All those who practised it were severely condemned.<sup>8</sup> There was even a provision to set the bond - servant free at the seventh year (Ex. 21:2). Since the covenant was national, the redemptive act of God must embrace all the Israelites without any exception. We shall now go on to discuss the motive behind the bond between Yahweh and Israel.



B. The Motive Behind the Formation of the Covenant must therefore be necessarily moral. The motive behind the covenant between him and the Israelites was fundamentally love. This covenant he freely and willingly established. In Semitic idolatry, the god was the natural father of the people. This is true of totemism in Africa. The adherents of totemism are believed to be the natural children of the totem god. Yahweh's relation to Israel was similarly a natural one, hence he was their father (I Chr. 29:10; Isa. 9:6; 63:16; 64:8; Matt. 6:9). He is the creator of the universe (Gen. 1:1; Mal. 2:10). As in Hosea, Israel was as spouse of Yahweh (Hos. 1; 2:16-20). This concept was quite different from the Semitic practice in which the female was the spouse of the god. She surrendered herself to prostitution in honour of the god through the priests that represented him. This was to ensure the fertility of the land. The prophetic symbol and phraseology here was all spiritual and moral. "Israel" the beloved children must be redeemed by all means.

The next topic is closely connected with this. If

God is by nature moral and loving, why did he display segregation in the act of showing his love to the people created in his own image?

C. The Justification of the Choice of Israel for the Covenant Relationship

God chose Israel with unparalleled love. He bestowed his special favour upon her as his first-born. But why should this be so? How could the Justice of God be defended on this basis? Why was another nation not chosen? Or, why did he not choose more than one nation? Certainly, these and similar questions will naturally occur as threats to the divine justice of God. But the point is that these and similar questions will continue to raise similar problems. For if he had chosen any other or all, the same questions would have arisen: Why these *people* and not those? Why not a few or only one section of a people? Why not all the nations together, and at the same time? The ethical prophets did not bother themselves with these questions. Rather, they provided practical answers to such possible questions, namely, the love and grace of God are perfectly demonstrated in the choice. God had only

chosen Israel to be the medium of his love and grace to others. Deutero-Isaiah attempts to satisfy these questions to some extent. Israel was to carry a mission to all other nations. This is perfectly illustrated in the servant songs (Isa. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12).

According to O.M. Burrows<sup>9</sup>, there were four stages in the Salvation history of the Israelites. First, the birth of a people out of the experience of Salvation, that is, the episode of the Exodus. Second, the covenant at Sinai. In thankfulness for Salvation the people promised obedience and worship. Third, the missionary vocation of the people was fully realized only in a time of suffering, i.e. the exile. Fourth, the people with the missionary vocation were Commissioned as the "Servant", "the Remnant", who would proclaim salvation to the people and the world.

But Israel failed to achieve the purpose of her election. She was to preach his name to the entire world. Whereas in the Old Testament, the Covenant followed the experience of salvation, in the New Testament, the order is reversed. The New Testament covenant was based on the blood of Jesus Christ shed for the Salvation of mankind.

Christ's glorious victory over death, sin and the devil was a fulfilment of the Old Testament vicarious suffering of the servant, which atoned for the sins of all nations. Israel was chosen for the world-mission, but she was self-satisfied with her own salvation, thereby falling short of the purpose of her election.

However, among the positive reasons for making Israel a peculiar choice might be the high religious tendency of Israel as a Semitic people. It is generally observed that the Semitic people were geniuses in religious affairs. Israel naturally belonged to the semitic mind (Deut. 26:5). The religious feeling and the consciousness of dependence of the semitic people

upon the deity, was particularly lively and powerful. According to Davidson, it was so powerful that,

The whole national life was governed by it, it was among the 'semitic' nations even in antiquity, that the religious spirit unfolded its highest energy. We perceive how exclusively the religious spirit drew into its service the whole national life, even among the Arabs. It was the same among the Assyrians, the Moabites, and other nations, where kings show the liveliest consciousness of standing in all their undertakings in the service of the national god, for whom it is that they carry on war and make conquests.<sup>10</sup>

The semitic people had attained and advanced to a very high stage of religious revelation among the ancient peoples. Though originally, the religion of the Semites

was not monotheism, there was among them what could be considered as henotheism or monolatry.<sup>11</sup> That is, each nation was having its own deity. This is evident in the following cases: Ashtoreth, the Phoenician goddess of love. The Sidonians worshipped the deity (I Kgs. 11:5; II Kgs. 23:13; Judg. 3:7). This was the Moon (female) counterpart of Baal. Baal, was the sun god. He was the lord, possessor, and husband of the Phoenicians and the Canaanians. He was their **farm** god (I Kgs. 16:31; 18:22, 26-27,40; II Kgs. 23:4; Judg. 2:13). Chemosh, was the god of Moab, Solomon attempted to nationalise him in Israel, but Josiah put an end to his worship (Num. 21:29; Kgs. 11:5-7; II Kgs. 23:13). Dagon, was most probably the god of agriculture; hence he was worshipped in Mesopotamia, Canaan and Philistia (Judg. 16:23ff., I Sam. 5:1-7; I Chron. 10:10). Milcom, was otherwise called Moloch or Molech. The Ammonites worshipped him as their national god. They sacrificed children unto him (Lev. 18:21; 20:15; I Kgs. 11:5-7; II Kgs. 23:10, 13).

It might be possible that some of the gods above were different names for the same deity. This is truly evident in Africa at large. For instance, "Olorun" is

the Yoruba name for the Supreme Being. Also, the Ibos (Igbo) of Nigeria call him "Chineke". But among the Kono people in Siera Leone, the Supreme Being is called "Meketa". The Baganda people of Uganda call him Katonda. Leza is the name given to the Supreme Being in Zimbabwe. The Zulu people of South Africa call him Unkulunkulu.

These Semitic and African concepts of the Supreme Deity are quite different from the Greco-Roman concept of the highest God. Though they recognised him as the one above nations, yet they also had a multitude of lesser deities which they worshipped and accorded equal prominence. Israel however advanced over the Semitic henotheism by ascribing practical ethical life to Yahwism.

Furthermore, unlike the Greco-Philosophical mind, or the metaphysical, (i.e. speculative) thought, the Semitic mind was very simple and emotional. The revelation given to Israel was therefore retained in its practical simplicity. It eventually became their unique religion. Theology which was formulated out of the religion came

at a later stage of their religious experience and maturity. When Christianity came in contact with the Greek philosophy, the influence was greatly felt. A lot of simple theology based on revelation has been questioned philosophically on the basis of sense and proof.

The rational history of Israel was very significant among the nations. It continuously revealed God's purpose for the nation according to the interpretation of the prophets. The historical vicissitudes of the nation recalled to the prophets the deeper meaning of the God-Israel bond. Israel must be preserved at all costs, and remain "the choice" of God, as the elect nation. Again, this was all due to the eternal love and grace of Yahweh for Israel. To this end, Jeremiah said: "I have loved you, O my people, with an everlasting love; with loving-kindness I have drawn you to me". (Jer. 31:3 LB.). God's prerogative



for the singular choice of Israel is better defended on the basis of Deuteronomy 7:7-8.

It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the LORD loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with almighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage.

The love and choice of God for Israel was eternal, because, according to Isaiah 41:8-9, the choice of God was irrevocable.

Finally, it is necessary to have a look at the conditions of the covenant. The covenant obligations were basically established in the Decalogue. All the constitution of Israel was regarded as religious and moral. This was the conviction of the prophets in their vigorous interpretations of all the provisions of the covenant law. This led the prophets to place little premium

on outward rituals and ceremonies in religion. According to Micah 6:6-8, the LORD was not pleased with burnt offerings and thousands of rams offered from sinful minds without repentance. On the contrary, He required what was good, and just, and asked them to love kindness, and walk in humility with God. The prophet Jeremiah categorically excluded ritual as a basis of the Yahweh-Israel intimate relationship. Israel was required to obey the voice of Yahweh in all things (Jer. 7:21-23).

It is very clear that sacrifice was not condemned in itself, but rather, it was the mere externalism of it, without any impact upon the moral life of the people, that was frowned at. Sacrifice was frequently undertaken in other religions as well. To distinguish Israel's unique cultus, its obligatory duties must be carried out in accordance with Yahweh's nature, upon which his religion was built. He was just, loving, righteous and holy. His worshippers must be morally upright without which the covenant would be meaningless. The love of God for Israel must be retrospective. Israel must in unalloyed love be faithful to Yahweh. Again, the prophets did not teach that the ethical ordinances of the law should not

be accompanied with public worship. The ancient Semitic religion which influenced Israel could not exist without worship in the forms of sacrifice and offerings. Israel therefore justified her choice, not only by making the religion of Yahweh ethical, but by striving always to make the covenant principles spiritual. All rituals and ceremonies must have both external and internal impacts upon the worshippers. The response of the Israelites to the covenant obligations would determine whether or not they justified the hope which Yahweh reposed on them. This takes us to the next topic which examines the nature of the covenant people.

### 3. THE COVENANT PEOPLE AS A RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE

Normally, the establishment of a treaty requires two parties. Israel as a party to the covenant was taken as a corporate unit. The relationship between the two parties must be extended to the Israelites' personal dealings with one another. As a people, they must be united. The covenant should enable them to unite as the body which God intended them to be. They should owe duties to one another, that is, they were to be keepers of one another. Both their civil and religious outlook must always be corporately strengthened to show them to the entire world as one people. This will make their moral uprightness significant.

Obedience had become the condition attached to the covenant relationship. Israel was to obey the covenant laws, and the whole nation was to remain obedient and loyal to the laws of their king in a true state of heart towards God. Such obedience must surpass the mere external act. When a citizen, for instance, gave his fellow citizen his external civil right, by being just to him, this must be done with perfect love. For Yahweh himself was seen in every respect, demonstrating divine love in his entire

dealings with man, and most especially the Israelites.

Yahweh was presented to the elect nation as a righteous God. The prophet Amos, delivering his oracle on this issue, declared: "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24). In other words, justice was to be done always to all men. There should be a torrent of doing good.

Hosea emphasized another attribute of God in Hosea 11:1, and that is, that Yahweh was a loving father of the Israelites. "When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son". Israel should not only love God. The redeemed people should also demonstrate love and mercy among themselves. While Amos required justice and righteousness, Hosea says, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings" (Amos 6:6). These two requirements were combined by Micah: "What does the LORD require of you, but

to do justice, and to love kindness". They should also walk humbly before Yahweh, their God (Micah 6:8).

Samuel, the prophet, judge and priest in Israel, reminded the Israelites of their covenant duties. The chosen people were called to obey Yahweh (I Sam. 15:22). This would enable God to manifest and glorify himself perfectly among his people and the entire world. Israel as a chosen nation, called and taught, should behave as a righteous servant. The prophet Deutero-Isaiah of Babylon said that Israel was being taught morning by morning (Isa. 50:4). This should enable the redeemed servants of the Lord to bring glory to God continually (Isa. 44:23; 49:3).

When Israel was called a holy nation, this denoted the "being in covenant" with God, the holy Being. In other words, the word "holy" was describing Israel as belonging to Yahweh - "I will be your God, and you will be my people". "And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation". (Ex. 19:6; Deut. 7:6). But "righteousness" described the proper and moral condition of the people, on their side of the covenant relation. From the moment of the effect of the covenant to the end, the people of the

covenant were to remain righteous. The prophet Isaiah condemned Israel's unrighteousness when he said: "How the faithful city has become a harlot, she that was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers". (Isa. 1:21). Israel was therefore called unto righteousness, as Deutero-Isaiah makes clear: "Your people shall all be righteous", "That they may be called oaks of righteousness" (Isa. 60:21; 61:3).

When the term "righteousness" was used for the people, it may mean various things, but generally, there were always two basic usages of the word, namely, physical and ethical (or spiritual) ideas. For instance the word יָשָׁר is translated "upright", which originally had a physical idea of "plain" or "level", just as the radical or physical idea in וַיִּכָּרֵץ means, "cut off", "separated", or "removed to a distance".

There is a likely radical idea of righteousness in Psalms 23:3: דְּרָגֹתֵי צֶדֶק: "paths of righteousness". This simply means, "even" or "straight paths", which were comfortable paths for sheep. In Arabic, the root Sidq, means truth or "to be true". When a man speaks the truth he is supposed not only to speak of what

conforms to the reality, but he must speak in accordance with his inner conviction as the truth. That is to say, "Practise what you preach". To do this, is to believe what one says as truth, and be honest or righteous in doing the same. This is the ethical or spiritual usage of the word "righteousness".

The verb prjy means "to justify", or to be found in the right, or to have right on one's side. This basically is a juridical or legal use and as such, it is secular or physical and not spiritual. It is not an ethical righteousness but a simple juridical right. This is believed to be the idea of Isaiah 43:26, "Let us argue together; set forth your case, that you may be proved right". This was when Israel felt that they had a plea which they could bring forward of being true to the covenant obligations, in order to be declared righteous. This same idea is contained in Isaiah 43:9. Any one who had a true case was to provide a witness to prove him right. It says:

Let all the nations gather together, and let the peoples assemble. Who among them can declare this, and show us the former things? Let them bring their witness to



justify them, and let them hear and say, It is true.

So, when such accused person had been found in the right before the congregation of Israel, he was to be declared righteous. This again, did not mean that he was spiritually pure, but simply that he was found guiltless in the charge preferred against him, or in the suit which the two opposing parties were contesting. This may be on such matters of common morals; one's relation to God; or speech i.e., speaking the truth or not. The standard of determining one's righteousness may be set on the social norms or customs, his own conscience, or the principles of the covenant.

Righteous in an ethical or religious sense later on gained pre-eminence over the general law of conduct. Hence "righteous" as a standard became the great general principle of morals and religion. When used of things, (e.g. "a righteous ephah") it simply means conformable to the idea of an ephah. Similarly, in Psalms 4:5, the Israelites were to offer "right sacrifices". This means such sacrifices as were agreeable to the idea of sacrifice.

When "righteousness" was used of men, the word meant any conduct or action which was in conformity with the popular custom, morals or the religion of Yahweh. When it was used of God, it suggested a moral standard which was more than merely God's will. In Genesis 18:25, Abraham said, "Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked, Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Most strikingly is the use of the word in Job 27:5-6. Here, Job condemned both man and God of injustice, and declared that he would adhere to righteousness. However, it is not easy to distinguish God's will from his righteousness, because his will is the norm of righteousness. It was the will of God that Israel must be holy and righteous unto him. Usually, when God's actions were judged, they were naturally placed on the same standard or norm with man's. But in some cases, God's righteousness was based on a higher standard, which was not of the general law of morals as such, namely, the redemptive sphere which was the basis for the covenant relation. It was a standard in his mind in connection with the salvation and redemption

of his people. This standard was therefore, simply put, "the covenant relation", which was in conformity with his very Being. When he acted, therefore, he acted as the God of salvation. In other words, it was characteristic of him to act as a saving God. Hence, his righteousness surpasses that of man. When God said, "I uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness", (Isa. 41:10 A.V.), it means that he acted to Israel on the basis of the covenant relation between them. It was his purpose to save them and make them the channel of salvation to all nations. Hence, it has been suggested that according to Isaiah 56:1, righteousness (and justice) is parallel to salvation: "keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come".

Another question which may arise from the above concept is, "Does it mean that Yahweh's righteousness did not exist before his relation to Israel?" When Israel was called, it was in the righteousness of Yahweh that she was called and chosen among the nations which he had created. The entering into the covenant itself was in righteousness (Isa. 42:6). In other words, it was due to Yahweh's love, grace and, of course, righteousness, that he

called the Israelites, and redeemed them unto his glory. Above all, God was not righteous to Israel alone, but to all his creation. In the above passage, and in Isaiah 45:18, it is obvious that the righteousness of God indicated a covenant that would involve the salvation not only of Israel, but also of the whole world as his creation.

We shall examine in the next Chapter, the Deuteronomic Covenant otherwise referred to as the Reform of Josiah. It was an Israel-Bound Covenant. "A New Covenant", which it paved the way for will be discussed also. Thereafter the Covenant Breaking and judgment will be examined. This will enable us to appreciate the unique preparation of the minds of the Israelites for the formation of Judaism in the exile and thereafter.

## 4 NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

## THE NATURE OF THE COVENANT GOD

1. This Egyptian custom of child-adoption was also common among the ancient Mesopotamians. Mosheh, in Hebrew means Moses, from a Hebrew verb Mashah, which means "to draw out". According to B. W. Anderson, The Living World of the Old Testament, (3rd Edition), pp. 49-50, "Mosheh is the Hebrew form of an Egyptian verb Mose meaning "is born". The Hebrew name, Mosheh (Moses) will therefore suggest someone "born and drawn out".
2. A. Alt, "The God of the Fathers", OTHR, pp. 5ff.
3. M. E. Andrew, "Israelite and Canaanite Religion - Christianity and other Religions", Orita, 11/1, pp. 20ff.
4. Ras Shamra is the present day Minet el-Beida, an important archaeological site excavated between 1929-1937. It is located on the Northern Syrian Coast, opposite the peninsula of Cyprus. See M.F. Unger, UBD, P. 912.

5. M.E. Andrew, Op. Cit., pp. 19ff.

THE COVENANT AS A DOCTRINE OF REDEMPTION

6 O. Eissfeldt, The Old Testament Study, pp. 38f.

7. Various nations, towns, and villages have different anthropologies. There is no nation or community that had migrated enmasse. For instance, India has a complex racial anthropology of about five groups. These are: First, the Negriots or Negroes of Africa; they were the oldest emigrants to India; second, the Proto-Australoids; they were a dark offshoot of the Mediterranean race; passing through the Near East to Australia and to India; third, the Early Mediterraneans; they were light in colour; the civilized or Advanced Mediterraneans made up the fourth group; they became the Dravidians of India who introduced the Standard Indian Language; lastly, the Vedic Aryans or Nordics. They were the origin of the Vedic, Aryan or Sanskrit speech in India.

- See: 1. H.R. Zimmer, "Hinduism", APE, X, pp. 490-492.
2. Peter Larsen, "Hinduism", WBE, VI, pp. 146-150.
3. Richard Harrington, "India/People and Religion", WBE, pp. 362-364.

Nigeria also is a multi-tribal nation. In fact, before the colonial era, Nigeria did not exist as one nation; rather there were various ethnic nations or kingdoms. Among such were the Fulanis; the Hausas; the Gombe empire; the riverine people of the delta area; the Itshekiris; the Igbos; the Yorubas; the Nupe kingdom and the Cameroonians.

In all the above instances, the various groups did not migrate to their final settlement at one time. They arrived at different intervals and fused together. This made the great difference with the formation of Israel as a nation. Her migration to and from Egypt was en masse. Her election or covenant relationship with Yahweh was contracted corporately. Her wanderings in the wilderness were a national affair. The conquest and apportionment of the land of Canaan were jointly prosecuted.

8. Samuel warned Israel on the possibility of violating this Israelite custom in Israel, in connection with the people's demand for a monarch. He was proved correct when Solomon organised Israel into forced labour, which was inimical to fundamental human freedom. It was a clever way of slavery (I Sam. 8:10-18; I Kgs. 9).
9. O.M. Burrows, Reviewer, The Christian Significance of the Old Testament. A.J.B. Higgins, Theology LIII, No 362 pp. 312ff.; A. D. Galloway, "The Universality of Christ", Orita, 1/1, p.24; J. Kenny, "Original Sin and Original Grace", Lenten Lectures, pp. 50ff.; A. Woollard, "Creation Redemption, Mission", Theology, LXXII, No 593, pp. 505ff.
10. A. B. Davidson, op.cit., p. 249.
11. Henotheism: This is the worship of but one god without denying the existence of other gods.  
 Monolatry: It is the worship restricted to but one god, even though one may believe in the



existence of many gods.

The two religions above of the Semitic people were quite different from Polytheism, that is, the belief in many gods. They were quite contrary to atheism, which is: Disbelief in the existence of God".

The religion of the Jews was supreme over and above all the Semitic beliefs and those of other idolatrous worlds. It was unique in that it was both Monotheistic and theistic. It was the belief in only one God. According to the ethical prophets, all other gods were to be denied as being existent. Furthermore, if they were non-existent, worship should, therefore, not be offered to them. Yahweh is the only Deity, holy and supreme.

## CHAPTER V

## FROM THE DEUTERONOMIC REFORM

## TO THE POST - EXILIC JUDAISM

## 1. THE DEUTERONOMIC REFORM

Before I delve into the unique Deuteronomic treaty I want to give a somewhat extensive background or introduction to the reform. This is necessary, as a succinct summary of the b<sup>e</sup>rith traditions from Sinai through the Judges to the Monarchical period. When the Deuteronomic reform eventually took place, it introduced a radical political structure which was quite different from the Mosaic Covenant tradition.

The authentic Yahwist Traditions originating from Moses at Sinai could not furnish a religious ideology to legitimize the monarchy when it was finally established first under Saul who reigned from about 1,020 to 1,000 B.C., and subsequently under David who ruled from about 1,000 to 961 B.C. The Community of Israel was then organized into a centralized unit due to military considerations. But the existence and function of the Community as a corporate body,

can only be properly understood on the basis of the Covenant tradition, which in itself, was an instrument of unity, binding the people together and with Yahweh.

A very vital question which ought to be asked is whether the Deuteronomic reform had been going on before the discovery of the Book of the Law. The fact that the Temple was being repaired at the time suggests that the Reform had already begun. (II Kgs. 22:3-7; II Chr. 34:3-8). The reform was an attempt to bring up to date the Law for the seventh century, during a time that the seventh century prophets were carrying out their revival movement, with especially, the preaching of Jeremiah. The finding of the Law was a new discovery of the Mosaic tradition, which was most probably written during the reign of the bloody and idolatrous king Manasseh (687-642 B.C.) since the king was opposed to Yahwism, and Assyria, the idolatrous sovereign was strong at the time, it was dangerous to publish the revised up to date Law by the editor or a prophetic school. It was therefore hidden until Hilkiah the high priest discovered it

during the course of the repair of the temple on the order of King Josiah (640 - 608 B.C.)

However, Josiah's reform came as a reflection on the pre - Mosaic, Abrahamic, Israelite traditions. The age long world concept of the King as the chosen one of the deities, an idea which was very predominant in the Ancient Near East, was re-introduced by King Josiah.<sup>1</sup> This, of course, was radically different, and opposite to the concept of the Mosaic covenant relation in which Yahweh was considered as the only God and .. "King", the Suzerain, of Israel. The monarchical political structure of Josiah's reign was to reflect theocracy that existed right from the Mosaic covenant election of Israel, and it lingered on throughout the period of the Judges. For instance, in Judges 8:22-23, the Israelites requested that Gideon should rule over them (as King), after he had successfully executed the civil war against Midian. He turned down the request and further declared that Yahweh should continue to rule over them; that is, to be their King.

This is the true meaning of theocracy. Israel was the "Kingdom of God". (See Exodus 15:18; Numbers 23:21 I Chronicles 17:14). God is the all- Sovereign Lord of the world and of human life in all its aspects. He was to be their king for ever and ever, (Ps. 10:16). But unfortunately, Abimelech, a questionable character and son of Jerubbaal, another name for Gideon, connived with his relations at Shechem, and was made king beside the oak of the pillar at Shechem (Judg.9:1-16). As would be expected, when monarchy was eventually established in Israel in earnest, it introduced a radically different and thoroughly idolatrous element into the Mosaic tradition.<sup>2</sup>

The epic traditions of Abraham, including the covenant tradition in the nineteenth to eighteenth century B.C., were appealed to, to furnish the "common ancestor" symbol of unity. The deity identified with Yahweh now bound himself by oath to fulfil certain promises made to Abraham. The covenant during the monarchical period was a description of the historical situation, especially in David's empire.

The Sinaic tradition was systematically re-interpreted. It was claimed that the Sinaic obligations were entirely ritual in nature and not ethical-functional. Since the first tables of the stone of the ten commandments, after all, had been "broken", it follows that the covenant was "broken". This was the phrase used in the ancient world to indicate the invalidation of binding documents. There was constant battle between the Mosaic and the re-introduced non-Israelite traditions into both the political and religious set up of Israel's existence. The prophets proclaimed and supported the political disintegration of Solomon's empire, in about 922 B.C., into north-Israel, and south-Judah kingdoms, as the divine chastisement of Yahweh for Israel's gross disobedience to the Mosaic covenant, and for the increasingly disturbing idolatry among the people.

The Northern Kingdom dynasties were in quick succession wiped out.<sup>3</sup> The Prophet Elijah in the ninth century B.C., ridiculed Israel for pretending to be loyal to Yahweh when they were in actual fact

loyal to Baal cults. Occasional reforms were carried out, especially those of Jehu in the north, and Joash (Jehoash) in the south, assisted by Jehoiada the priest (II Kgs. 9:1ff.); and the attempted reform of Hezekiah in the south according to II Kings 18:1ff. But according to II Kings 22-23, not until Josiah's reform, in the seventh century B.C. was serious reform undertaken; it was partially successful because it was largely external. The discovery of an old copy of the Mosaic legal-ethical tradition, that is, the Deuteronomic code, shook the idolatrous monarchical state. In fact, the ethical prophets had earlier predicted the disastrous end of Israel before it finally collapsed: Israel, the Northern Kingdom to the Assyrians in about 721 B.C., and Judah, the Southern Kingdom, to Babylon in 587/6 B.C. Their respective downfalls were because of their gross violation of the covenant obligations. The whole state collapsed, and the religious symbol, the temple was destroyed.

According to the narrative of II Kings 22-23,

the law book of the covenant was discovered in the Jerusalem temple, during the reign of Josiah of Judah (640-609/8B.C.). King Josiah thereby made a covenant along with his people, binding themselves before the LORD, to walk after him, and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes, and to perform the words of the covenant that were written in the book. The significance of this covenant is that it served as "the foundation of the Judaism which arose after the exile"<sup>5</sup>. (This will be looked into in more details very shortly under "the covenant in Post-exilic Judaism"). That is to say, the action of Josiah the king was essentially a covenant based on legislation which was identified with the earlier covenant obligations to Yahweh. The royal prestige and supremacy of the king were vividly demonstrated in this covenant. It is true that this reform did not succeed as such, and it is usually referred to as external; yet it was an established attempt which identified covenant obligations with a law code, to be enforced by political means.



It paved the way for the religion of the exile which culminated in post-exilic Judaism; and Judaism consequently provided a good foundation for Christianity.

After the solemn act of Josiah in introducing the law, there was the notion of covenant-making between Israel and Yahweh as occupying the central portion in the people's religious thought. This concept prevailed in the prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The Babylonian exile no doubt helped to familiarize the Jewish mind with the idea that truly, the covenant was conditional; its success depended upon the reaction of each party concerned to the terms of the agreement.

However, this covenant should not be seen as a treaty between two parties as such, namely Yahweh and Israel; but rather as a promissory oath whereby both King Josiah and his people bound themselves to walk in the already established (but broken) covenant relationship between Yahweh and his people, Israel.

The covenant of Josiah was therefore a one-party covenant, whereby the old covenant was renewed in a reactionary and revolutionary way, during the crucial state of the political existence of the people. Israel, the Northern kingdom had been scattered all over the Assyrian empire. In order to survive, Judah, the Southern kingdom must re-discover herself, if only she could be faithful to the covenant, as the elect of Yahweh, - since Yahweh was the master of nature and the supreme controller of all nations; the faithfulness of Israel to the Deuteronomic reform was therefore very crucial. The terms of the discovered law had to be kept strictly. Their conformity to the provisions of the law book would enable them to remain as God's elect, even though they should pass through great trials.

The prophets after Deuteronomy considered ברית as the foundation and the goal of the life of Israel. The covenant was the Jewish religion. All was ברית to them. Indeed, it was the only religious concept of the people.

They were to separate from all impurity in every aspect of life. ברית was also to shape the political, economic and social life of the people. Since Yahweh was consistently true and righteous with respect to the covenant, Israel was also expected to remain faithful always within the responsibility of the covenant relationship, between Yahweh and his people over the ages. (See Genesis 17:7-8, 19). The desire to carry out the above responsibility brought about the concept of the "New Covenant" which we shall discuss in the next section.

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## 2. THE IDEA OF A NEW COVENANT

### A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Old Testament concept of a new Covenant came into prominent use in Jeremiah.

The Ministry of Jeremiah extended over a period of forty years from the reign of Josiah to the exile (623-586 B.C.). Though Jeremiah suffered much persecution throughout his Ministry, save his period under Josiah, he continued to utter his voice of warning against Judah (Jer. 13:8f.). He also spoke against the false prophets both in Judah and those in exile (Jer. 28:12-29). Such prophets were Hananiah, Ahab, Zedekiah and Shemaiah.

Jeremiah, like Hosea had a personal pain of loneliness, agony of spirit, and fellowship with God. This experience gave him his importance in the religious history of Israel. Previously in Israel, even in the case of Hosea, religion was a corporate unit, in accordance with the Covenant which was a community affair. The tribes or the nation as a whole were seen as an entity. It was not a personal relationship as such, but the individual could only find his religion within the group.

## The Message of Jeremiah

Despite the fact that Jeremiah assisted Josiah in his reform, he still found it necessary to carry out his reformation. This was not merely due to the fact that all the succeeding Kings after Josiah turned idolatrous and so led Israel astray, but more strikingly because the reformation of Josiah was rather external. It failed and did not achieve its purpose. It was more or less a renovation exercise. Jeremiah therefore embarked upon an internal and spiritual reform. The religious situation in Judah during this period is vividly described by the message of Jeremiah's five visions against Israel namely:

First, the vision of the Almond tree<sup>6</sup> (Jer. 1:11-12).  
Second, the vision of the Cauldron, a boiling pot (Jer. 1:13-19).

Third, the vision of the broken cistern (Jer. 2:1-15).  
Fourth, the vision of the potter at the wheel (Jer. 18:1-12).

Finally, in Jeremiah 7:1-15, Jeremiah delivered his great temple sermon.

It all depended upon time and situation. This accounted for the change on policy. While Israel was most probably faithful during the earlier message, and to stress the fundamental obligation of Yahweh in the covenant Law, Isaiah was very optimistic. But now, Israel had backslid. She became stubborn and unchanging. She totally forsook Yahweh and ignored her own obligation of the covenant relationship. Hence captivity was inevitable.

The character of the Deuteronomic covenant is succinctly stated by Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 7:23 and 31:33: "I will be your God, and you shall be my people". The new covenant was to be based on the Mosaic pattern of the ancient ideal. While the written law was not to be abolished, it was to be re-written in a new fashion, upon the hearts of the people in order to effect an interior regeneration of spiritual life. This brings us to consider first, why Jeremiah should be the champion of the new covenant, while it is believed that his prophecy was connected with the reform of Josiah which itself was revolutionary and a

quest for true religion.

The account of the reform of Josiah does not indicate any active involvement of Jeremiah in the revolution. According to John Paterson, "that may be due to his youth or it may be that he was not yet recognised as a prophet.<sup>7</sup> As such, it may not be said that he was indifferent to such a great move. Truly, Jeremiah started his ministry when he was considerably very young, but this is not the whole truth. What one may suggest is that because Jeremiah was a lonely man who had no friends, save Baruch his scribe, and Ebedmelech, the Ethiopian eunuch of Zedekiah's palace, (Jer. 32:12, 38: 7-13) and because he engaged in a preaching mission in order to further the reform, he was greatly hated.

The intention of the reform was noble but Jeremiah saw the execution of it as faulty and the results inadequate. It will be recalled that the reform of Josiah was basically external: He brought out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and all the host of heaven and burned them.

He deposed the idolatrous priests who were burning incense in the high places in Judah. He brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD and burned it at the brook of Kidron. He also broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes.

Furthermore, Josiah brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah and defiled all the high places where they had been functioning. Such high places were broken down. The king also defiled Topheth, which was in the valley of the sons of Hinnon, where the Israelites used to sacrifice their sons to Molech. He removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, and burned chariots of the sun. All the various idolatrous altars set up by his ungodly predecessors he burned with fire.

Moreover, Josiah defiled the high places dedicated to Ashtoreth, the Abomination of the Sidonians; Chemosh, the abomination of Moab; and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. The altar and the Asherah which Jeroboam II set up at Bethel were pulled down and burnt to ashes. All the tombs there were



defiled. He exhumed all the bones there and burned them upon the altar.

For Jeremiah, all the above reforms were shallow and external. The people had not been thoroughly purged within. The altars in their hearts must be broken and circumcised. This does not mean that Jeremiah condemned Josiah's reform as such. All I am stressing here is that, he did not see the adequacy and sufficiency of the Deuteronomic reform which was not internal and spiritual; rather it was a mere outward show. Jeremiah was significantly emphasising here that the meeting-place of God and man in the covenant fellowship was the solitudes of the human soul, and that true religion consists in inward or spiritual fellowship with Yahweh, because only the pure in heart could see God. In the light of this, Jeremiah vehemently championed the course of the new covenant, that survived the Old Testament and surfaced in the New Testament.

Jeremiah 24: 7, says:

I will give them a heart to know that  
I am the LORD; and they shall be my  
people and I will be their God,  
for they shall return to me with  
their whole heart.

When the Psalmist asked the question: "Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? (Sanctuary), he responded thus: "He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully." (Psa. 24:3-4). According to Matthew, in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). Let us now take up the covenant of Jeremiah.

## B. THE COVENANT OF JEREMIAH

Like Josiah, Jeremiah championed the centralization of worship at the temple in Jerusalem. This further stressed the unity of Yahweh's worship. Jeremiah's reform was indeed very spiritual. He called for inner repentance of individual's sins, and any return to Yahweh must take place at a deeper and spiritual level. Thus, the contributions of the prophet to the religion of Israel were centred on the doctrine of individualism and the new covenant. Like the prophet Ezekiel in the exile (Ezek. 11:19; 18:31; 36:26-28), this would no longer be written on the stone-tablet but on the heart of individuals.

With Jeremiah we come to a new religious dimension of personal direct relationship with God. He condemned the meaningless and in-effective religious worship of his people and discovered his God for himself. In the light of this, Jeremiah has been described by scholars as "the father of religious individualism, and the founder of personal faith".<sup>8</sup>

Like Deutero-Isaiah, Jeremiah was hopeful in the restoration of Israel back to Judah by the God of mercy and grace (Jer.29:11). Like Amos, he believed in the universalism of the Godhead as the controller of human history. God, he presented like Zephaniah and Amos, as the judge of not Judah alone but of many other nations. With Jeremiah, the bonds of nationalism were to be broken. However, since Jeremiah considered the religion of Israel hitherto as dependent merely on a book-covenant and sacrifice, he did not pay attention to a third party of life-blood needed in such a personal covenant relationship between individuals and Yahweh. This was a vital aspect of Israel's religion which made ancient covenant relationship valid.

According to Jeremiah, "Covenant" should designate the moral and spiritual relationship between Yahweh and Israel. This was so because the prophet lived in a critical age in the history of Israel. Yahweh's covenant with the fathers had been broken. The life of the people was in no way compatible with the provisions of the law of Yahweh based on the covenant relationship.

He therefore rose up to demand a new covenant with Yahweh, contrary to the outward or external reform of Josiah, emphasising external religion. The worship and life of the people must be in true obedience to God in accordance with the provisions of the covenant law, or else, judgment would always be the repercussion of such vague and valueless religion. Hence Jeremiah declared thus:

Behold the days are coming says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer. 31:31-33).

This concept of a new covenant is indicated in Hosea 2:18-25. It was not the same as the covenants with the fathers, but one written on hearts, and therefore, spiritual. Obedience to such a covenant would enjoy the forgiveness of God and avoid his disastrous judgment. This is the basis of the concept of the new covenant in the New Testament (see Matthew 26:28). However, for Ezekiel later, the new covenant was to be the renewal of the one made at the Exodus (Ezek. 20:34-38). Truly, Jeremiah did not deny the existence of previous covenants; but his concern was that all such covenants including Josiah's were no longer effective, and as such there was the grave need for an entirely new one, which would be internal and spiritual. It should be an intimate relationship based on mutual confidence. According to W.L. Holladay, "The idea of a 'new covenant' must be seen against the general Israelite background of 'covenant'."<sup>9</sup> Israel was to conform to the ethical norms set forth in the Decalogue and other covenant laws. This new covenant was to make Israel as the real elect par excellence, to be separated

apart from all other nations for Yahweh.

It is necessary to examine the meanings of the expressions used in Jeremiah 31:31-33, in order to understand fully, Jeremiah's concept of the new covenant. The expressions: "I will put my law within them" and "I will write it upon their hearts" are parallel. The Mosaic law was written on external material objects, the tablets of stone, but now, by contrast, the new law was to be written on the internal objects, the "hearts," of the people. In the Old Testament, the heart was considered as the seat of intelligence and will, including the desire to obey the law of God. It was an internal condition. Furthermore, according to Isaiah 10:7, the heart is the centre of planning and the carrying out of plans. The words: "within them" and "upon their hearts" were meant to express one and the same idea. That is, the new covenant will be written inwardly on the tablets of the hearts of Israel, and it will become a part of the total will of the people, to the extent that it would not be broken as those written on the outward and material stones which were easily destroyed. The will of God would thereby permeate the desire of the people and the totality of their existence.

What would be the result or outcome of this solemn religious revolution? Yahweh declared that he would be their God, and they would be his people. This formula was the same with the Sinaiic covenantal relationship, and of course, the traditional way of expressing the Yahweh-Israel relationship (See Exodus 6:7; 19:5f; Leviticus 26:12). But this relationship had been broken and needed to be restored at all costs. God would no longer forsake them because in the effect of the new covenant, the people would no longer forsake Yahweh.

It follows that, according to Jeremiah 31:34, there would be no necessity to teach or persuade the people any more to know Yahweh or be loyal to the covenant obligations, because they would naturally know him and do his will, for their hearts were inscribed with the knowledge and will of God. In other words, God's will had been grafted into the will of the people without any exception.

Furthermore, verse 34 indicates that God would forgive the sin of the people and remember it no more. Since the previous relationship was broken by the iniquity of the people, now that such iniquity had been forgiven, Israel would enjoy a healthy and permanent fellowship with Yahweh.



The idea of a new covenant in Jeremiah is an extraordinary one. It shows a radical solution to a grave problem between Yahweh and his people, Israel. It is significant to note that the notion of the new covenant was so extraordinary in Jeremiah that it was not echoed elsewhere in the Old Testament as promulgated in Jeremiah, although there are references to the concept by the ethical prophets, and Ezekiel (Ezek. 16:60; 34:25-31; 37:26f.). Interestingly enough, the term "new covenant" survived in the Intertestamental literature, in the writings of the "Damascus Scroll".<sup>10</sup> Perhaps this was so, because, the community in the Dead Sea considered themselves as members of a "new covenant" in the land of Damascus. The Jewish sects in this area separated themselves from the main body of Jews by prayer, fastings, study and ritual cleansings. They understood themselves to be outside the range of Israel's sin and therefore to be fulfilling the words of Jeremiah. Jeremiah's concept of the new covenant is also reflected in I Baruch 2:35, and Judith 1:17-18, 23-25, though the specific words, "new covenant" were not used.

This concept survived until the New Testament period. The Greek phrase: ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη: means: "the new

covenant". It appears in the tradition of Jesus, particularly in connection with the last supper instituted by Christ. It tells about the new relationship found in Christ as uniting us with God. Through the blood shed by Christ, a provision was made whereby man could receive the forgiveness or pardon of his sins which estranged him from God, thereby breaking the everlasting covenant relationship. By one's faith in the Cross of Christ, a unique demonstration of God's love towards his people, an everlasting fellowship will be enjoyed with God. This was the final result proposed by the new covenant of Jeremiah. It was to be a once-and-for all everlasting solution to the constant violations of the covenant-relation, which separated the elect people from Yahweh.

In conclusion, the following may be said of Jeremiah's concept of the "new covenant", that ceremonies without righteousness availed nothing. National reforms would be of little use unless they were accompanied by moral or ethical and spiritual regeneration. Religion should be a personal and individual relationship and fellowship with God. All these were to be effectively achieved in a new age in which God was inwardly known and "loved" by individuals,

who will naturally or willingly live within the obligations of the "new covenant". His concept of the new covenant was not to end with the people of his age, but indeed it was to be an everlasting covenant which did not only survive the Old Testament, and the ~~Intestestamental~~ period, but culminated in the "New Covenant" of Jesus Christ.

The hope of Israel is recorded in the oracle of Jeremiah, in chapter 29, of his book, which he sent from Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon. He admonished them to settle in the land and be submissive to Babylon; for after "Seventy years"<sup>11</sup>, Yahweh would deliver them and return them to their father's land.

Throughout the pre-exilic age, both prophets and bible writers did not show that Israel's religion taught explicit monotheism. Though Yahweh was worshipped, Israel's doctrines were still under development. For instance, there was no doctrine of a future life as christians would believe today. The Old Testament concept of Sheol, was simply a place of abode for the dead, a nether world.

The soul may remain in that deep or grave suffering, or it may be there in a perpetual joyous deep. Moreover, the final stay of man's soul was cut off from both the living man and God. But, the prophets had taught Israel enough to comprehend God's plan to make her his kingdom on earth, a chosen nation for a purpose of saving not only Israel but the whole nation and make the entire universe his dominion.<sup>12</sup> But unfortunately for Israel, she was stubborn and hardening. She refused to cooperate with her prophets and simultaneously rejected God's way and followed her own lust which led the nation to destruction.

In the next section, we want to examine the covenant - breaking of the Israelites, and the judgment of Yahweh upon them. We do not wish to attempt to go into the eschatological or prophetic picture of God's judgment here. Rather, attention will be drawn to the ultimate reaction of ancient Israel to the covenant stipulations, and how God dealt with the long deteriorating cultic and social bankruptcy of the nation.

### 3.. COVENANT-BREAKING AND JUDGMENT

There is a common adage which says: "Where there is no law, there is no sin". Once there is no sin or offence committed, there could be no condemnation or suffering.

The Yahweh-Israel bond, as we have examined, was saddled with obligations which must be fulfilled by Israel. Failure to do these, meant a breach of contract, which may lead to the wrath of Yahweh, the Suzerain. When a covenant between man and man was broken by a party, such offender must suffer the penalty. It was a terrible experience for a contract to be broken among peoples of the Ancient Near East. The culprit would suffer great disaster, and have all privileges abrogated. Similarly, for Israel to breach the stipulations attached to the Yahweh-Israel covenant, meant that she suffered grievously. In short, it was a curse to be found guilty. That apart, according to Exodus 32:10, and Numbers 14:12, if Israel complacently broke the covenant law, Yahweh may annul the whole contract.

At the Sinai Covenant, it was obvious that Israel had a strong faith and trust in Yahweh. Neither did they doubt the purpose of God to make them his own people, nor

did they entertain **any** fear as to their ability to fulfil the contract obligations. Confidently and in unison, they declared: "All that the LORD has spoken **we** will do, and we will be obedient" (Ex. 24:7). They **felt** secured and satisfied within the covenant. On the part of Yahweh, he constantly sustained the Israelites; even when they erred and threatened the **stability** of the covenant, he provided the means of **atonement** for the whole nation. Whenever he discovered disloyalty, he punished the guilty appropriately.

Israel was established as a light to the world. She was to be the kingdom of God to embrace all other nations to acknowledge the universal sovereignty of God. Therefore, the progressive **acts** of God in history convincingly demonstrated God's benevolence over his people. Though they gravely sinned and were **punished**, they were never destined for doom. The Israelites regarded Yahweh as the God of **Battles**, and to attain **victory** in their warfares, they must maintain a close **relationship** with the powerful and exalted **God who was** in total control of nature and history. The forces of heaven and natural **phenomena** were utilized by God to give the Israelites victory at battles.

Whenever Yahweh resigned the Israelites to hostile oppression due to their sin, as is evident during the period of the Judges, and during the monarchical period, the people felt that God was far off in hot anger. In such situations, the glory of the covenant was then at stake. On such occasions, the prophets rose to the task of admonishing the people to repent of their decadent cultic and social life, and return to Yahweh, who had only executed his righteous judgment on them.

In Chapters 1-2:3, the prophet Amos highlighted the irrevocable and incorruptible divine execution of God's judgment over the Gentile world. Similarly, both Judah and Israel were not to be left out. They were to be dispatched to a foreign land for their faithlessness. The Day of the LORD would certainly come upon them according to Amos 2:4ff. Amos followed up in chapter 3, verse 2, by reminding the erring Israelites of their eternal election by God: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth". They were singled out above all other nations. Because of their shameless violation of the covenant law, they were to prepare for the Day of the LORD which was to mean doom for the defiant nation. They

would suffer a special severity of divine judgment. No sinner would escape the national catastrophe (Amos 9:2ff., 5:18-20; 8:9ff.). However, there was still some hope for the Israelites, if only they could turn back to God in penitence, justice and righteousness (Amos 5:24).

From the foregoing, we may say that the doom of the oppressing foreign nations meant salvation to Israel. Yet, in God's justice, the Israelites too were to face the music for their grievous violation of the covenant obligations. All along, the hope of salvation was there, which was indicated by the demonstration of Yahweh's divine sovereignty over nations and events. Israel was not an object of God's wrath as such. At last, after the Israelites might have been reprov'd, they would be restored back into *their* land. According to Hosea 3:1; 11:9-11, God's covenant fellowship with Israel was everlasting. But truly, for the unrepentant elect people, the Day of Yahweh came upon the whole nation severely.

Both Israel and Judah had failed to heed the persistent warning of their great prophets. They failed to keep their part of the covenant obligations. They served strange gods and committed all sorts of sin and socio-religious



iniquities - inviting the Day of the LORD upon themselves.

According to J. Mauchline,<sup>13</sup> in 721 B.C., the Day of the Lord came upon the Northern Kingdom, Israel was defeated and the citizens were deported by the Assyrian King, Sargon II, to her empire. So also, according to G.W. Anderson,<sup>14</sup> in 598 B.C., 587 B.C. and 582 B.C., Jerusalem fell to Babylon. The Jews were deported to Babylon, most of them elites (II Kgs. 24:8-17, II Chron. 36:9-10, II Kgs. 25:1-26; Jer. 40:7-13; II Kgs. 25:8-12; Jer. 52:32). Judah was so sacked and ransacked during these calamitous operations that only "the poorest people" of the land were left behind in adverse poverty and dejection. And for the exiles, the reign of Nebuchadnezzar was a terrible period for the Israelites, though, generally, they enjoyed a considerable amount of religious freedom.

#### 4 THE COVENANT IN EXILIC PERIOD

##### A. The Covenant awareness in Palestine

The Jews in Palestine, as well as those in exilic dispersion had different interpretations of their plight during this epoch of religious refinement.

Only a few of them realized that it was their gross violation of the covenant law, such as idolatry and injustice, that earned them their plight. This group of penitent people were found not only in Babylon but also in Palestine and Elephantine near Egypt.<sup>15</sup> But the religious situation in Palestine could be said

in general to have considerably deteriorated. Baal was still being worshipped (Jer. 7:17-19). There was no longer centralization of worship in Jerusalem. Local sanctuaries increased. The foreign gods worshipped in Palestine during this period most probably included the gods of their conquerors - Babylonian. The queen of heaven, the sun, and the Babylonian god of vegetation were worshipped. So also, Tammuz was worshipped.<sup>16</sup> These foreign cults were prevalent in Palestine because, according to Ezekiel 8:12, some of them thought that Yahweh, the covenant God had failed on his part, and as such they were free to choose another deity of their choice. It is noteworthy to mention here that different peoples from the surroundings such as Samaria, Canaan, Hittite, Ammon, Edom, and Moab would seize the opportunity of Palestine's fall to move into the ruined land to settle with their gods (Ezr. 9:1, Neh. 13:23-30, Ps. 137:7-9). And if this were true, the religious pollution of the land would be heightened. There was also the continuation of inter-marriages in a big way, a quick and convenient way to religious plurality.

(Ezr.9:2,12; Neh.13:25-26)<sup>17</sup> In short, the religious condition in Jerusalem during this period was deplorable, It was a "Widow without Solace"<sup>18</sup> But there were some few who appeared to be faithful to Yahweh. This class of people still offered sacrifices to Yahweh at the altar of the ruined temple (Jer.41:5)<sup>19</sup>

Both the prophets Jeremiah of Jerusalem and Ezekiel of Babylon were very prominent at this initial stage of the exilic epoch in bringing the Jews back to Yahwism. For example, in Jeremiah 24, the prophet compared the Jews in the exile with those in Palestine. In his vision of the two baskets of figs, the Jews in exile were likened to the good figs whom Yahweh would preserve and restore back to Palestine. But the Jews left behind in Palestine were likened to the bad figs. They, and those who escaped to Egypt were to suffer Yahweh's wrath for their sinfulness. In the parable of the two great eagles, and the cropping of the cedar of Lebanon (Ezek.17:3-10), Ezekiel condemned "the house of Israel", for their rebellion against Yahweh.

They failed to repent of their sins, and trampled on the covenant law.

B. The Covenant Awareness of the Jews in Elephantine

If those resident in Palestine were still guilty of idolatry and syncretism, one would imagine the religious pollution that must have been done to Yahweh in the strange land of Egypt. For instance, Jeremiah rebuked the people at Pathros (Some other Jews settled in Migdol, Tahpanhes and Noph) for worshipping the queen of heaven, and other gods (Jer. 44:8, 15-19). This led to the prophecy of their fall in Egypt (V.27).

As regards the covenant awareness in Elephantine, the story is the same with that of Egypt. Elephantine is otherwise called Yeb. It was an island on the Nile in Upper Egypt, opposite Aswan. In 1907 and 1908, excavations were undertaken on the oldest part of the island under two German researchers, namely, Rubensohn and Zucher. During this exercise, a large number of Aramaic Papyri,<sup>20</sup> which belonged to a Jewish military Colony in the island were discovered. When this community was founded is not exactly known.

But it is certain that this was a second generation of the captives from the northern tribes, Israel, who were exiled in 721 B. C. by the Assyrians. When Cambyses came to Egypt in about 525 B. C. he discovered that though the Egyptian temples were destroyed (most probably by Babylon), the Jewish temple was spared. A study of the Aramaic Papyri has shown that the community there had a national religion. They worshipped God "Yahu" or "Yaho". The documents have revealed that there were many other local gods in the area, namely, Herem bethel, Eshem bethel, Anathbethel, and Anathyahu.<sup>21</sup> This shows that not all the Jews worshipped Yahweh, the covenant God.

The colonists developed a sacrificial system and a priest tradition different from that of Palestinian Yahwism. It appears as if they were entirely ignorant of the central sanctuary and the Deuteronomic reformation of Josiah which took place in Palestine during their absence from the holy land. Though they kept feasts such as the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover,<sup>22</sup> their forms

were not strictly tied to the Old Testament Yahwism. For instance, in their temple worship, women were allowed to minister. This might have been an influence from the cults of their place of abode. The Worships connected with Anath might have necessitated the adoption of women priesthood which was not practiced in ancient Jewish tradition. Anath was a feminine goddess, and this accounts for the prominence given to women in connection with her worship. (This is true of traditional worship in Africa). This religious innovation therefore should not surprise us after all. Again, this cult suggests at once the goddess whose name appears in Anathoth, the home of the prophet Jeremiah. Though, the "Orthodox Hebrews sternly disregarded any sexual element in Hahveh's (Yahweh) nature, ... the Baals had their regular female counterparts; and the colonists, without being too precise as to their mythology, may well have felt that with a god there ought to be a goddess".<sup>23</sup> And in such a situation like this, it was inevitable to make adequate provision for the worship of the goddess. It is obvious

therefore that the Elephantine community was religious and were inclined to Yahwism, though their national religion was syncretistic and was far from orthodox Hebrew or Israelite Yahwism and Judaism.

From the above discussions, it has been noted that the religion practised by both the Palestinian Jews and those of Egypt, and especially Elephantine, was far from the religion of the covenant. It was all syncretistic. It was more or less the other side of the coin in comparison with the religion of the Israelites prior to the exile. But one thing must be borne in mind, and that is, both the Jews in Palestine and those in Elephantine were no longer enjoying the services of the great political ethical prophets. Jeremiah who was claimed to have been taken along with the remnant of Judah by Johanan the son of Kareah<sup>24</sup>, died shortly after his arrival there, and after the message of Jeremiah 44. When we consider the covenant awareness of the exiles in Babylon, it will be seen that the services of the great political and religious prophets enjoyed there made a great difference to their religious yearning.

Among such prophets were Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah who stayed with the Jews in exile. Jeremiah also ministered to the exiles all the way from Jerusalem. The valuable works of these great prophets gave the religion of the exile a uniqueness far above those of Palestine and Elephantine.

It is interesting to note that while the Palestinian Judaism retained sacrifice in its worship, and the Elephantine Judaism refused any sacrificial rites, the Babylonian religion was prominent for its sacrificial rites, the exiles thought sacrifice to Yahweh could be best offered only at the altar in the Jerusalem holy temple.

C. "Religion", as practised by the Babylonians during the Exile.

There are two broad ways of looking into the factors that contributed to the influences of the exile over the religious development of the exilic Jews. The first is the immediate environment and its impact upon the Jews. And the second is the religion of the Babylonians as practised at that time.



Like the Jews, religion played a vital role in the civilization of the Babylonians. They too were greatly influenced by the Sumerian<sup>25</sup> culture like the Assyrians. The Babylonian gods, rituals, myths (the myths of creation), "mode of writing, temple architecture",<sup>26</sup> and in fact all the elements of the religious pattern of Babylonia and Assyria, were borrowed from the Sumerians.<sup>27</sup> Such cult objects that featured prominently in the Babylonian religion included statues of the gods, altars, censers, and libation vessels.

Babylonia worshipped so many gods.<sup>28</sup> Magnificent temples were built for these gods and full of rituals. At the head of the pantheon was the triad of great gods, namely: Anul, Enlil and Ea or Enki. Each of these ruled over the three divisions of the universe, namely: heaven, earth and the waters.

There was also the ancient mother goddess represented by Ishtar, who had temples in most of the great cities of Babylonia and Assyria custodizing the earliest cultic tablets in her temple at Erech. In addition to these gods were hosts of evil spirits, such as Lamashtu, a female demon. There were numerous priestesses, attached to the worship of the goddess of evil spirits.

When Babylon, the capital city of Babylonia<sup>29</sup> became the principal city of Mesopotamia, Marduk became the supreme power in the world of gods, and he became the chief or national god of Babylonia. But Ishtar was worshipped as the war-goddess. Ea, i.e. Enki was invoked as "the Lord of Wisdom". Shamash was the sun-god and he was regarded as the guardian of justice and morality. Sin,<sup>30</sup> was the moon god.

The Babylonian religion demanded elaborate well trained classes of priests, and temple buildings. The priests functioned as the sole religious officials. No enterprise whatever could be embarked upon in Babylonia without first consulting this class of priests for necessary rituals. The Sumerian priests were responsible for developing the cultic literature. This job was similarly taken up by the Babylonian priests. Such literature comprised of many hymns and prayers to the gods, and a number of interesting myths.

The Babylonian religion contained many and outstanding seasonal rituals throughout the year. Most prominent among these festivals was the Akitu, the New Year Festival.

During the feast, all the gods from the four corners of the empire were brought to Babylon and carried in procession led by the king of Babylon.

The earliest Mesopotamian religion appears to have been nature religion. In Babylonia, the deity was supposed to be fully in charge of human affairs. This deity was believed to send waters to provide them vegetation on earth. This concept of deity is reflected in Gudea's prayer to Ningirsu thus: "O my master Ningirsu, Lord who sends awesome waters. Potent Lord, engendered by the great mountain ... Your heart, which lifts like the swell in mid-ocean, comes crashing down like great ebony trees, ... warriors, your heart remote like the Heavens, how can I know it?"<sup>31</sup>. Agriculture is the basis of the Mesopotamian life. They depended on irrigation from the Euphrates and Tigris rivers and their tributaries for agriculture. Therefore, the Babylonian religious activities consisted of the New Year Festival which was intended mainly to secure fertility and prosperity for the coming year.

Though, priesthood and ritual were not strange to the Jews, yet we shall soon see the significant role of the priest in the formation and development of covenant cultus during the exilic and post - exilic periods. We shall also take a brief note of Ezekiel's concept of the temple building and worship (Ezek. 40-46).

For the purpose of this section, we shall now proceed to discuss the law of Babylonia during the exilic period. Though, more of this has been examined under "the statutes of the covenant".

#### The Babylonian Law

Another interesting aspect of the Babylonian religion was their religious laws and ordinances. There was no separation between their socio-political and religious laws.

The Babylonian Law was the most important of the Ancient Near East. It covered all legal institutions as affecting every aspect of human life, such as social relationship, political set up and the economic stability of the empire, especially trading. Socially, the law dealt with execution of marriage contract,

morals, ethics, and fundamental human rights. Politically, the law dealt with administration of government. This made the priests to share their functions with the state officials, the head of which was the king, there was no separation of power as such. There was no concept of the national god Marduk as ruler, hence the policy of absolute monarchy, because the great King of the empire was representing the supreme god, especially during sacred rites. Religiously, the temple of the city was the centre of its legal life. It has been noted that the Babylonian pantheon were conspicuously involved in all aspects of life of their worshippers. They were responsible for the individual and national defence against external enemies and for prosperity and order. Through signs and omens, they actively guided the policies of their country. Moreover, religion and politics became more inextricably linked than ever before.

Prominent of the ancient law was the code of Hammurabi of the 18th century B.C., which was discovered in 1902 A.D. at Susa, Capital of Ancient Elam. This law - document existed before the Mosaic decalogue, as it is supposed that this might have influenced Moses somehow in his legal draftsmanship. The exilic editors might have been influenced also by the uniqueness of the Babylonian law which had undergone

centuries of legal development. By this we only mean that many basic principles of law were common to all or most of the Ancient Near East patterns.

On the whole, the role the law played in the post-exilic Judaism and also as the state law, vividly indicates a considerable influence of the system of the Babylonian law over the place accorded the law in Judaism. Its compilation was given careful attention during the exile to involve the socio-political and religious existence of the Jews in Palestine after the exile. And during the post-exilic period, the application of the law was thoroughly implemented as purported, to the end that the covenant obligations may be fulfilled par excellence.

How did the Jews fare in Babylon, with particular regard to their religious consciousness? This is the vital question to be answered in the next section.

- D. The Religious Consciousness of the Jews in Exile.  
 i. The Covenant Awareness of the Jews.

Jerusalem fell at last, and most of the inhabitants were deported to Babylon. The temple had been destroyed. But the Jews in Babylon did not find things too badly. For instance, they were given social freedom and economic opportunity. Religiously however, they were

now far away from the holy land and the temple in Jerusalem. They were living in a strange environment. They inhabited an area where the culture was superior to theirs. The Jews believed that Yahweh had manifested his glory and his Lordship in Palestine.

The next question therefore will be why did Judah not disappear in exile like Israel? After all, they both flagrantly violated the covenant law. The answer to this was that, it was her renewed faith that kept her alive, though the Israelite traditional faith was greatly shaken. Hitherto, the Jews believed that they were a chosen race. Furthermore, their theology was that Jerusalem could never fall because Yahweh their God would defend them at all costs. The exile now proved this theology false and this constituted a great blow to the faith of the Jews. Were the gods of Babylonia stronger than Yahweh after all? Or, where was the Divine Justice? These and similar questions undoubtedly must have been asked by the exiles. They had now come into a new environment, and they recognize the fact that the world was a different and larger place more than they ever assumed. Their religion therefore could no longer be regarded as a national Cult. It was universal.

The faith of the Jews survived the catastrophe. But the credit for this would go to the saviours of the situation. And of course, since man tends to learn more responsively under tension and difficulty, it goes without exaggeration therefore that the religious awareness of the Jews during their years in captivity was very acute and genuine. These two factors helped the tenacity of the faith of the exiles to be greatly fortified by the great prophets, and kept alive the hope of restoration.

However, there were some others among the exiles who did not only discredit the Josiah - reform or that of Hezekiah, but they also doubted the existence and omnipotence of Yahweh. Otherwise why should the gods of Babylonia be stronger than Yahweh, the covenant God? But those of the exiles who were penitent of their sins lamented the situation. This is explicit



in some of the literature of the period, such as the book of Lamentations, Psalms 60, 74 and 123. These are communal laments. Psalms 77:1-16; and 102 are individual laments.

An area of problem for these loyal Jews was whether Yahweh could be worshipped in a strange land, some 700 miles away from Jerusalem,<sup>32</sup> where other gods were prominent and prevalent. Hence they lamented and showed their frustration on this issue which is reflected in Psalms 137:1-6.

These loyal and penitent Jews, for their religious anxiety, at first, wanted to substitute the presence of Yahweh with wood and stone which prophet Ezekiel condemned in Ezekiel 20:32, and spoke against it before they could carry out the plan. Probably this was the introduction of the object in the Holy of Holies, which was the ark that contained the Mercy seat, the Law-tablets, and Aaron's Rod.

The other Jews who doubted the Omnipotence of Yahweh, accorded Marduk, the Babylonian god all

attention of worship (Ezek. 14:1-11). However, this attitude was not peculiar to this class of people in Babylon alone. Their counterparts in Palestine as well as in Egypt/Elephantine were also sceptical. Yahwism was either neglected or completely polluted. This group of people in Babylon hoped for immediate return to Palestine, and as such they did not fully cooperate with their overlords. According to Jeremiah 29:5-7; the prophet Jeremiah had written about this time to the exiles, to advise them to settle there happily. He explained to them that the exile was Yahweh's divine act, using Babylon to chastize the idolatrous Jews. They had to turn to Yahweh and worship him alone even in the strange land, because he is the God of all nations who could be worshipped not only in Jerusalem, but also everywhere. And according to Ezekiel Yahweh would be to them in Babylon, at least, "a sanctuary in a small degree",<sup>33</sup> This was indeed a new concept to Yahwism. Yahweh was supposed to be the God of the holy land of Palestine where the holy temple was situated in Zion. He was also the

exclusive God of "Israel", the elect nation.

The effect of the circumstances surrounding the covenant religion of the exile can be determined from biblical records. It might be interesting to ask why some of them were really contemplating to return to Jerusalem before Jeremiah intervened. As it has been noted earlier, some of the exiles did not accept the defeat over their God and land. These people still believed strongly, the Isaiah's doctrine of the inviolability of Jerusalem and the indestructibility of the temple (II Kgs. 19:32-34; Isa. 31:4-9). To them, Yahweh was still mighty and strong to save and deliver them. Certain historical events provided ground for the exiles' hope for immediate return; such as the siege of Tyre which began in about 568 B.C. Also, Nebuchadnezzar was confronting Amasis. According to Jeremiah 28:1ff., there was the indication that some of the exiles held a strong hope in the fall of Babylon just as Assyria fell in power. They were

therefore eagerly awaiting some immediate miracle of deliverance. Hence in Jeremiah 29:1ff., Jeremiah refuted the false prophecy of the exilic false prophets.

When the Jews finally settled in the land, and became rich farmers, artisans, and traders, the former religious hopes were shattered by love of wealth and comfort. We need to be reminded that the Jewish captives were not treated as slaves, but they were granted many privileges. They were treated as citizens. Apart from this socio-economic freedom granted them, they also had religious freedom. The strange attitude of those who neglected Yahweh can further be attributed to the fact that the weak-minded ones lost every hope in Yahweh. They were carried away by the religious attractions of their masters.<sup>34</sup> This group lost entirely their religious identity.

But for those who accepted their fate as a challenge and punishment for their sins as a nation, they had optimistic hope of a brighter future when they would return a better people to their home land

(Isa. 52:1-3,7-9). Their faith was never shaken, nor did the environmental attractions affect their loyalty to religion. Though they were deprived of their worship in the temple, they had acquired a richer knowledge of the nature of Yahweh that he is a God of the universe who was not restricted to Jerusalem alone (Ezek.37:26-27). They recognized that he could be worshipped even in the strange land of their abode. These people met in small groups for worship of Yahweh, for fellowship, prayer, compilation of the scriptures, and the study of the Law. Thus, according to Jeremiah 29:12-14, these people could have access to Yahweh through prayer even where there was no temple. Similarly, in Deuteronomy 4: 27,29, which is believed to have been written either in exile or shortly before, it is argued that the Jews would be scattered abroad, and they would seek and find Yahweh there, if they would search him with all their heart and soul. On this basis the exiles turned to Yahweh with great confidence as their sanctuary in the strange land "for a while" (Ezek.11:16).

This was to teach the exiles that Yahweh's shrine was their humble and repentant heart. The material temple was now to be replaced by the spiritual temple in their heart. Ezekiel 11:16, further stresses the importance that Yahweh could be worshipped everywhere and especially among the gentiles in Babylon. Probably, this was also to prepare the exiles for the universalistic concept of Judaism, which unfortunately the exiles were not inclined to effect, neither was the idea given any attention during the post - exilic Judaism. It was a problem which lingered up till the christian era.

This group of repentant exiles thus turned to Yahweh devotedly. Most probably, a lot of prayers in the Psalms, such as Psalms 130, were composed during the exile by some of the exiles. It is most probable that this group of people founded the synagogue<sup>35</sup> worship. Though this would only be at its rudimentary stage. There were no organised worship assemblies as such, but according to Ezekiel 8:1; 14:1; 20:1, the prophet and some elders of the exiles used to meet for religious discussions. The ancient custom of the elders leading community in their life activities which had ceased since the

collapse of the monarchy, reappeared in the exile. It may be suggested here that Israel once again in their colonies settled in families and clans. The list of the returnees in Ezra 2:3ff., 8:1-20, further buttresses this idea. They were mentioned under heads of families and their districts. Indeed, the Jews enjoyed a favourable atmosphere of religious freedom and peaceful co-existence with the Babylonians. It was a very conducive situation to genuine religious activities.

The loyal devotees of Yahweh realized that their sacred traditions were relevant to them and so they studied, searched and interpreted their oral and written traditions, the Torah. The result was that they preserved the sacred heritage in writing to form Pentateuch for future generations. The priests known as Levites played prominent roles in this regard. Among such was the great prophet Ezekiel.

It is significant to note that before the exile, though not so obvious, not all the priests were celebrants at the altar. According to II Chronicles 15:3; 17: 8-9; 35:3, some of them were also "teaching priests" of the Law

To understand more precisely the features of the religion of the exilic Jews, it will be appropriate to discuss briefly the external religious inclinations and the theological concepts of the exile. Special contributions made to sustain the covenant religion by the exilic great prophets, such as Ezekiel, and Deutero - Isaiah, to preserve the faith of the Jews during that trying period will be examined also.

## ii, The Religious Phenomena of the Jews

Yahweh is a living God . He is the God of nature and of all situations. He was God of Israel in Palestine, and he was still their God in the foreign land. This faith was what the loyal exiles, and especially **their** religious leaders such as Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah, and Ezra preserved.



They therefore found some substitutes for their Palestinian religious practices in Babylon.

In the first place, their elders were meeting in Ezekiel's house for religious counselling. Later on, the synagogue worship of Yahweh began. This was most likely to have been the true rudimentary beginning of Judaism. However, this type of worship was not as elaborate as the temple worship at Jerusalem, i.e., in small measure (Ezek. 11:16). Despite the sacrifices, for example, at Sheba (Jer. 6:20), their worship was more of external shows. It is most probable that this group of people observed some memorials which kept them aware of the deliverances of Yahweh from the past (Isa. 51:1-7). Such observances included the covenant with Abraham and his blessings over the patriarchs, the incident of Exodus, the covenant relationship, the conquest and entry into the promised land. Others were fasting (Zech. 7:3-5; 8:19), in the fourth, fifth and seventh months; and the weekly sabbath observance. This weekly sabbath, according to Ezekiel 20:12ff., was a regular day of congregational worship. This made the religion of the exile a living faith in the exile.

Though some of these memorials and other rites had been practiced in pre - exilic period, yet all the exilic observances of the ceremonies gave them religious significance which made Judaism unique of all religions. This is well reflected in the Priestly Code,<sup>36</sup> which emphasized the laws governing the rites. Also, these religious observances undoubtedly gave them some hope that Yahweh would soon deliver them and restore them to their home - land.

The chief aim of these observances was not just a commemoration of past incidents, but first and foremost as a distinctive measure to identify themselves with the covenant God. The priests and the prophets of the exile were mainly pre-occupied with the task of making the exiles realize that as the elect of God, Israel must at all times and at all costs, and at any place show herself as a special people, chosen for a purpose by Yahweh.

It is most probable that this worship would include the reading of the Law, the prophetic books, the book of Deuteronomy, singing of songs-the Psalms,

and prayer. Prophets and priests undoubtedly would feature prominently in leading these religious activities in the synagogue. The fact that they became more prominent during the post - exilic period attests to this.

Also, the freedom accorded the Jews in the exile afforded them the privilege of retaining their national identity, even though they had no political "nation" as such. For instance, the circumcision of old was renewed in a more significant form as it gave the Jews a distinctive Jewish nationality in the stranger land where such a custom was not practised. This however, gave them a sense of belonging to Yahweh religiously, and as such, a conviction of superiority over other nations of lower religions. The exiles also kept the ancient laws of purification, such as special abstinence, for example, from food. Socially, the exiles were more civilized during and on their return from exile. They became more national and united. Also they developed their literature in composing scriptural books. The last of such literary work was

some forty years ago discovered during the reign of Josiah, which constituted a great material for the Old Testament. Prominent among the literature of the exilic period was the production of the Pentateuch. However, there have been various varying views as to the actual origin of these books as regards the writer(s), dates, and place. Since it is not within our scope of coverage here, it will suffice, not to examine the characteristics of the Pentateuch, but rather, to mention that with the priestly document of the Pentateuch, the Torah was completely composed during the exile.

E The Comparison Between the Babylonian Religion and the Religion of the Exilic Jews.

There are different and multifarious definitions of the term "Religion". In general, it refers to any system of faith and worship. According to T. A. Bryant, "Religion is man's recognition of his relation to God and the expression of the relation in faith, worship, and practice or conduct"<sup>37</sup> M. F. Unger says: "Religion according to Cicero, means "attention to divine things"<sup>38</sup>.. It is the feeling of absolute dependence upon the divine, and the observance of moral law as a divine institution.

In the light of the above mentioned definitions of religion, it is obvious therefore that while certain religions may share common views in some religious features, certainly they would differ in some other emphases. The careful examination of the religion of the Babylonians and that of the Jews reveals these similarities and dissimilarities. To the Babylonians, religion played a vital role in their life. They had a strong faith in many gods over which Marduk was the Supreme deity. They believed that Marduk was the sole owner and controller of his empire.

He cared for their wellbeing through his subordinate gods or intermediaries. But unlike Israel, Babylon could not be described as believing in only one Supreme God, though Marduk seemed to be their national god. It is very glaring that they believed in and worshipped both Marduk and many other gods.

The Babylonian temples were full of altars and images. Though the Jews were used to erecting altars in their temples, Yahweh was never represented by any figure as such. Even where we had the Mercy Seat and the ark, these were mainly to indicate the presence of Yahweh and not to represent him. But as we consider Ezekel 20:32, it seems the exiles were influenced by these elaborate temple features. Here, Ezekiel condemned the worship of wood and stone. Definitely, these were god-statues set up to be worshipped.

The Babylonians revered their gods greatly. Magnificent temples were built for them. This was also true of Israel's holy sanctuaries. Although, before the exile, Israel had been known for building a great magnificent temple for Yahweh (I kgs. 5:2-5;6). But as we consider

the plan of Ezekiel's temple, its ordinances and structure, one would believe that even though Ezekiel might be reflecting back to the ancient Solomon's temple, yet there is every probability that at the time of his visions in Ezekiel 40-46, the Babylonian magnificent temples and cultic practices had some influence over him. However, this is arguable especially as one considers the reaction of the returnees to the foundation of the new temple laid in Jerusalem after the exile. We are told here in Ezra 3:10-12, that while some rejoiced for the great work begun, others, especially the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, old men, "wept with a loud voice". The reason for this touching reaction was that they compared the new foundation with the first house", that is, the previous temple built by Solomon which was destroyed in 587/6 B.C. But if Ezekiel's plan for the new temple in Palestine had any effect on such a foundation laid after the exile, one might be correct therefore to suggest that the Babylonian magnificent temple buildings had some influence over Ezekiel's concept of the temple in Jerusalem.

As regards the Babylonian literature comprising of lyrics and religious hymns, myths and rituals, one may

say that in a way, the exilic editors were influenced by the Babylonian art of literature. This superior culture does not mean that their religion was better. The point of argument here is that the Babylonians were superior in literary work. As we have noted under the religion of the Babylonians, the Babylonian priests developed a great deal of their cultic literature. The Pentateuch is believed to have been compiled during the exilic period, and other literature such as some books of the Psalms and Lamentation were composed in the exile.

We have noted that Anul, Enlil and Ea were the triad - great gods at the head of the Babylonian gods. This concept was quite different from the later developed "Trinity" of Christianity. To the credit of the exiles, within such a religious plurality, the exiles championed the course of monotheism more than ever before.



Yahweh was the only one true, great and holy God of all nations. He had no associates whatever. And this also made Judaism, the genuine re-discovery of the covenant god.

We have noted earlier how religion permeated into every aspect of the Babylonian lives; worship and all religious rituals were well organized. Priests were the sole religious officials. They were responsible for temple chants, music, sacrifice, and fortune-telling. This practice might have encouraged the exiles considerably to reawaken the significant role of the priests in ancient Israel. The priests were the sole religious leaders of the exiles. In the post-exilic Palestine, the priests became so prominent that they took the overall control of the new community. Though, we learnt of such governors as Shesh-bazzar, the prince; Zerubbabel, and Nehemiah (Ezr. 1:8; 2:2, Neh. 8:9), but if we examine the life-pattern of the returnees in Judaea, it will be realized that their whole life was organized according to the provisions of the Law which, Ezra the high priest was the custodian of.

Similarly too, the role of the ancient prophets was not reinstated after the exile. For instance, in Zechariah 13:1ff.; the prophets were scorned as representatives of the "Spirit of uncleanness". The returnees were not influenced by the Babylonian role of the "baru" priests who were precisely, the prophetic priests, who also interpreted dreams. The reason for this was probably that the Law was the sole regulator and organizer of the life of the people. Hence, Ezra emerged as the Chief priest of the post-exilic period. He restored the Law and organized the temple worship. He, as the priest, with the assistance of Nehemiah, organized the social and moral life of the people as well. However, the idea of Chief priest here does not necessarily follow the pattern of Babylon. From time in the past, the priests had been very prominent in the religion of the Israelites. But what we are saying here in effect is that during the exilic and post-exilic periods, the priests emerged as the sole head and benefactor of the people, both in political and religious life.

In the light of this therefore, one may suggest that the exiles were influenced to some extent by the significant role attached to priesthood in Babylonian religion.

During the post-exilic Judaism, the observance of feasts was also very prominent, such as the weekly sabbath, atonement, the Passover and the Tabernacles. Like the Babylonian feasts, the Jewish priests were the sole officials of these commemorations during the post-exilic period. The King was very prominent during the pre-exilic period participating in some-religious ceremonies. Although, during the post-exilic period, there was no more institution of kingship as such. But even then, the Prince and the Governor were not given this cultic role to play.

The place accorded the Law in Babylonia was very significant. There was no separate religious law, because the only national law that was in existence covered both political and cultic affairs. In other words, the Babylonian law embraced all aspects of human life. This was so because there was no separation of powers between the state and religious officials. And since religion was the centre of the

life of the empire, the priests prominently dictated the affairs of the state to the king. In case of the post-exilic Judaism, the Law became the yardstick of community organization. Ezra was charged with the responsibility of administering Judea solely on the provision of the Torah (Ezr. 7:14-26). Though the pattern and system of the Law were similar in the two religions, yet it is important to note that their provisions differed greatly.

The dream of the prophet Ezekiel for a reunion of both the south and the north did not materialize. The remnants of the north were later known as Samaritans, and the descendants of Judah eventually separated to the extent that in later period, John 4:9, testifies to it that the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. The reason why Ezekiel's dream failed to be fulfilled may be traceable to the separatist policy of the post-exilic Judaism. The Samaritans were regarded as non-Jews like the other countries (Ezr. 4:1-3; Neh. 4:1-2; Ezr. 9:1). This attitude was followed by great hostility between the two parties. In Ezra 4:4ff., we discover that the Samaritans who wished to

cooperate initially now turned to be a co-persecutor of the returnees. They taught, that as Jews, they had equal right to participate in the temple building. But the returnees thought that the Samaritans had been polluted by inter-mixing with the people from the province beyond the River, such as Ammon and Arabia and those that had been deported to Samaria during the Assyrian capture of the northern Kingdom in 721 B.C. Such deportees included people from Persia, and Babylon (Ezr. 4:9-10).

The new emphasis to mark the characteristic of a Jew was the keeping of the covenant Law. The Law was divine, and hence the strict observance of it was advocated. Moreover, the leaders of the community was like the priests of Babylon that Israel's salvation lay in a strict observance of this Law. Again, the Divine Law was the state Law as earlier indicated. The elaborate observances of such religious acts as the sabbath worship, circumcision, the keeping of feasts and fasts and ritual purity. Like the Babylonians, these and similar acts gave the post-exilic Jews a distinct identity and unity.

The faith of the Jews was wholly regulated by the covenant provisions of the Torah. This faith or the religion of the remnant Jews is commonly referred to as Judaism. This faith or religion was so named conventionally only in later Hellenistic circles of the Dispersion (see Galatians 1:13-14). "Judaism" which was applied to the faith of the Jews who returned to Judea from the exile is not found in the Old Testament. But it is simply to mark the faith of the Jews during the exilic and post-exilic periods, among whom the covenant faith was renewed under new expression, reflecting the conditions following the collapse of Judah. According to B.W. Anderson,<sup>39</sup> the exile marked a beginning of a completely new chapter in the history of Israel's faith. And the religion of the people was wholly established on the provisions of the Law. Hence Judaism may be referred to as "the Religion of the Book".

In conclusion therefore, Judaism was unique because of the new interpretation given to the covenant Law, the Torah. Also, the Torah was unique because it was given by Yahweh himself, unlike the Babylonian Law which was given by the great king of the empire, for example, the Code of Hammurabi.

Again, the Torah was unique not because it embraced all aspects of man's life - political, social, and religious, like the Babylonian Law, but because in actual fact, while the priests and prophets in Babylonia could use their discretion to control the affairs of their people, the post-exilic priests depended solely on the provisions of the Law to regulate and organize the political, social and religious life of the covenant people.

Before we examine the covenant in Post-Exilic Judaism, it is very necessary to find out the religious influences which the exile had on the Jews under Persia.

##### 5. COVENANT IN POST-EXILIC JUDAISM

When the Israelites had done full penance for their guilt, God pardoned them (Isa. 40:2). Within the context of his covenant with them, they were restored back to Jerusalem during the reign of Cyrus the Great, the Persian King, in 538 B.C. The eternal and irreversible covenant - relationship was once again revived.

The Israelites enjoyed the unmerited mercy of God and they were re-settled in the promised land, and the temple which Proto-Isaiah thought was inviolable was once again restored.

In the previous sections, it has been discussed how Jeremiah predicted late in the seventh century B.C., that "a new Covenant" would be made with Israel which would be written upon the hearts of the people. So also we have discussed at large the vast impact which the exile had on the covenant people. But alas, the noble idea of "a new Covenant" was not fully realized until the post-exilic period, during the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra, respectively, in the fifth century B.C. The traditions of these two great leaders, give us yet another biblical narrative of covenant-making in the Old Testament.

About a century or more after the return of some exiles from the Babylonian/Persian Captivity, initiative from the community still in exile resulted in action dedicated to bring the life of the Judean Community more



into conformity with the demands of the religious legal tradition based on the Mosaic covenant. This led eventually to the leadership, respectively of Nehemiah and Ezra. However, the Biblical account of the immediate settlement of the Jews after the exile has been a subject of controversy. So also is the dating of Ezra and Nehemiah.

According to Anderson,<sup>40</sup> Ezra was supposed to have arrived first in about 458 B.C., and Nehemiah in 445 B.C. This may be due to the religious bias of the author and similar writers, that Ezra was more of a religious reformer, while Nehemiah was more of a political revolutionary. Since we are not dealing specifically with the history of the period, we shall not discuss this controversial issue here; yet for a better coherence, we shall follow the dating of scholars who hold the opinion that Nehemiah arrived earlier than Ezra.

According to Ezra 7:7, Ezra arrived in Jerusalem from Babylon in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, and, Nehemiah 2:1, says that Nehemiah arrived in the twentieth year of Arataxerxes. If the same king was referred to here, that would make Ezra's visit at 457 B.C.,

and Nehemiah's at 444 B.C. But due to other internal considerations in both books it would be more appropriate to take Nehemiah's visit at 444 B.C., the twentieth year of Artaxerxes I, and Ezra in the seventh year of Artaxerxes II, in 397 B.C.<sup>41</sup> Alternatively, if the dating of John Bright is taken that, Nehemiah was in Jerusalem between 445-433 B.C., and Ezra arrived in 428 B.C.,<sup>42</sup> Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem still preceded Ezra's.

#### A. The Reform of Nehemiah

Nehemiah occupied an important position in the Persian Court of Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.), at the time the Jews were arriving back in Judea. He obtained permission from the king to visit Jerusalem because of the precarious position of his country-men at home. He first visited Jerusalem in about 444 B.C. from Susa in Persia. This visit is commonly tagged political, because he was saddled with the responsibility of rebuilding the ruined walls of Jerusalem to ensure the safety of the inhabitants. This task he successfully achieved despite grave oppositions from some disgruntled elements in the land. Our concern here is chiefly on his second visit which took place after

twelve years from his return to Persia, when he had realized his first objective. The visit is dated at 432 B.C.<sup>43</sup> It was during his second period as Governor that he was seen to the best advantage as a reformer.

First of all, he cleansed the temple precincts where Tobiah, a foreigner, had been in residence, so as not to pollute the temple. Tobiah, a Samaritan was forbidden to occupy a room in the temple and take part in temple worship. This was a "separatist" sentiment, which appeared to be against the universalistic feature of the Exilic-Judaism according to Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 40-55).

Nehemiah next turned his attention to the proper rendering of tithes which had been neglected. It was the past ancient custom of the religion of Yahweh in accordance with the Mosaic law. This would enable him to find provision for the priests who were no longer committed to their ancient official duties; thereby he strengthened the sacred ministration in the temple.

Another area of his reform was the proper keeping of the Sabbath. As in Trito-Isaiah (cf. Isa. 58), there was a strong plea for the spirit of Sabbath observance which was the sign of the Mosaic-Sinai covenant. Business was strictly

restricted on the sabbath.

The social ills were also dealt with by Nehemiah. Among such were money-lending (usury), rich capitalism and oppression of the poor in the city. In the matter of mixed marriages, he ordered that in future, these should not be solemnised. Thus Nehemiah distinguished himself not only as a political, social, and economic revolutionary, but also as a religious reformer, who championed religious purity and gave the Jews a very realistic, practical and spiritual religion, Judaism. In his attempt to emphasise a unique religion, he made Judaism a particularistic religion, thereby violating the exilic universalistic outlook of Judaism, so greatly taught by the exilic prophets, especially Deutero-Isaiah. However, according to the vision of Ezekiel, in Ezekiel 40-48, it would be viewed that Nehemiah was not all that conscious of particularism, rather he wanted primarily to establish a pure religion full of righteousness and holiness. In the spirit of Jeremiah's "new covenant", Israel was to be distinguished or set apart from all other peoples as the elect of Yahweh in the covenant relation. In other words, Israel was to be morally or ethically pure and religiously

righteous unto Yahweh more than any other people. So far, it has been established that Nehemiah had concerned himself solely with physical security of the city, political and honest administration, and some religious reform; but in the next section, we shall consider Ezra principally as a religious reformer, within the covenant fulfilment.

B. The Covenant of Ezra

The Exilic prophets, (such as Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah) and Ezra, had prepared ground for the effective take off after the exile. They did the spade work to sustain the faith of Israel.

Ezra came back to Judea with a copy of the Law of the LORD, which became the basis for the new community (Ezra 7:6-10; Neh. 8:4ff.). All the people responded favourably to discharge the covenant obligations faithfully. Consequently, the elect nation came into a sensitive and healthy re-union with Yahweh.

It is evident that Ezra, the scribe, was commissioned from Babylon with the "Book of the Law of Moses", to promulgate and administer it among the Jews in Judea (Ezr. 7:14, 25f.).

What Ezra actually brought from Babylon or read to the congregation (Neh. 8:2ff.) is not quite certain. **could** it be the Law Book, that is, the Pentateuch or the Law of Moses? Ezra most probably brought to Jerusalem a collection of the ritual and ceremonial laws of the old wilderness religious traditions as contained in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers of the Pentateuch, which had been developed before Deuteronomy and Ezekiel. **These** collections Ezra, or the Rabbinic Schools of Babylonian Judaism compiled and redacted with editorial additions. This "Pentateuch" he put in force in Judea as the Law of the land, based on the covenant obligations. There was now the **observance** of the covenant Law without a "state Law". Israel's salvation now demanded a strict observance of the divine Law.

It is most probable that the reading of the Law could only have taken place after Nehemiah had come and restored the fortifications of Jerusalem, enabling the population to settle. This, of course, is attested by the dating of his visit at 397 B.C.

Ezra undertook certain religious reforms which were of paramount importance to the re-establishment of the Mosaic covenant, in the spirit of Jeremiah's "New Covenant".

According to Nehemiah 8:1ff., a solemn assembly of the Judeans was held, there was the public confession of their sins, and the law of the covenant was formally enacted as binding upon all the community. This was sealed by a covenant participated in by their leaders (Neh. 9:38; 10:1ff.). This was similar to the Deuteronomic ratification of the Book of the Law of Josiah (II Kings 23:1-3). It follows that what Ezra read in Hebrew and orally explained to them in Aramaic was very appropriate and meaningful to the people; hence their solemn response.<sup>44</sup> It is observed that the poverty, distress and political subjection to the Persian rule of the post-exilic community in Judea are attributed

to the failure of the Jews to obey the covenant law; hence the princes, Levites and priests had to make a firm covenant and set a seal to it. But that apart, this measure was also in conformity with the pre-exilic practice of bearing witness to the conclusion of a covenant. Henceforth, the covenant law became the yardstick by which the community was organised; that is, it became an oath to obey in all its ramifications. The expanded Sinai covenant was now enforced by the political authority of the Jewish new state. The covenant law became the final authority. All that remained was the constant interpretation of the Law and continuous obedience to it.

Furthermore Ezra, like Nehemiah, emphasised the strict observance of the Sabbath, of sacrifices, feasts - especially the feast of the Tabernacles - <sup>45</sup>fasts, and prayer (cf. Isa. 56). Ezra also reinstated the celebration of the Day of Atonement, and Circumcision, which were ancient practices of the pre-exilic religion, based on the covenant relationship. He also ordered the immediate and compulsory expulsion of foreign wives among the Jews, to avoid moral laxity and religious idolatry - (Ezr. 9:11f., see also Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3f.). This was a great emphasis



of the pre-exilic social policy to make Israel a pure and special race, bound to Yahweh in a covenant relation. <sup>46</sup>

The above features of Judaism show vividly that Palestinian Judaism was now quite different and more practical and elaborate than the Babylonian Judaism as practised by exiles. Though the elements of Judaism were not altogether strange to the Jews, yet they can be said to be new because of the more solemn and meaningful emphasis attached to them, and which were based on the Yahweh-bound Abrahamic covenant and the Israel-bound Sinaiic covenant.

If the religion of the exile, that is, the Judaism practised in Babylon was different from the early Hebrew religion, then, the post-exilic Judaism was the continuation and development of that unique exilic religion. At this point, Judaism reached precisely the take off point of a systematised, reformed and reorganised religion, reflecting the concept of the "new covenant". Here, both external and internal obligations of the covenant relation were reflected. Henceforth, every Jew in the community became obliged to obey the Law of Moses, that is, the p<sup>e</sup>rith obligations. Thus the Sinaiic covenant became permanently identified

with the accumulation of the legal-ritual tradition, and the Community was identified not as the various people who wished and accepted the rule of God, but as the ethnic group of those who were heirs of the promise to Abraham in direct lineal descent. The Israelites remained within the framework of the covenant tradition throughout the Old Testament and the Inter-testamental period and up to the time of Jesus Christ.

C. The Religious Effects on the Jews Under Persia

(a) Preamble

Nabonidus, who reigned from 566-539 B.C., was the last king of the Babylonian empire. He served the Moon god - "Sin". After his campaign against Cilicia and Syria, he carelessly retreated to the Arabian desert leaving his civic duties. This accounted for the omission of the Great New Year Festival. For this great sacrilege, most of his subjects were disgusted with his rule. This was the delicate position in Babylon when Cyrus II (the Great), king of Ashan (559-530 B.C.), and founder of Persian Empire was gaining ground and extending the empire. At last, in 539 B.C., Babylon was captured by Cyrus. He was welcomed as a liberator and deliverer. He granted both the citizens and exiles total amnesty and religious toleration.

II Chronicles, Ezra and Isaiah refer to Cyrus in the Old Testament. Also, the Cuneiform<sup>47</sup> documents among which was the Cyrus' Cylinder,<sup>48</sup> give us elaborate detail of Cyrus' reign and his edict of religious toleration and restoration. Although Cyrus assumed the royal titulary religiously, he himself did not perform the ritual duties of a Babylonian king at the New Year Festival of 538 B.C. Nevertheless, he had a great respect for their religion. This he showed vividly by repairing their temple. He also restored the cult statues brought to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus, to their various cities, including Jerusalem. This was in conformity with the glorious prediction of Isaiah 35, 40-45, about the Jews' return to Jerusalem. This enabled the eager and devoted Yahwists to return to Judea.

With regard to the religious influences the exile had on the Jews now that they were under Persia, one should not expect to record even effect. If Babylon was captured in 539 B.C., and the edict of Restoration was promulgated in the following year (538 B.C.), this would certainly witness a large number of returnees who had long been planning and yearning for such a glorious opportunity. This group of the first returnees would most probably be the devotees of Yahweh.

In the light of this therefore, it is controversial as to how far one can assert that the Jews were influenced in the true sense of it by the Persians.

But as one goes into the post-exilic life of the returnees one will discover some remarkable parallels between Judaism and the religion of Persia, i.e., Zoroastrianism. However, this is not to say precisely that the effects were established, or that the Jews owed their post - exilic development of Judaism to the Persian religion. But if the Jews were still under the indirect rule of Persia until 333 B.C., (a period of about two centuries), when Alexander the Great conquered Persia under Darius III, at the battle of Issus, one may not emphatically deny the possible Persian influences of otherwise, on the Jews. In brief, this is a very controversial topic. While we believe that to some extent, there would be some influence, we do not hold the view that the Jewish editors and apocalyptists depended solely on Babylon/Persian influences in their works.

Let us now consider some specific concepts.

b. Zoroastrianism. This was the religion of Persia founded by Zoroaster. He was a monotheist. He emerged as a religious reformer. Like Judaism, he rejected all the gods of the early religion and taught a belief in one God. Certainly, this would interest the Jewish Monotheists.

Zoroastrianism was a dualistic religion. It offered salvation through ethical or moral standards. This salvation of course was not for the soul but for the body. Furthermore, Zoroastrianism was rich with the doctrine of eschatology and apocalyptic.

**i** Eschatology and Apocalyptic.

According to H.H. Rowley,<sup>49</sup> apocalyptic and eschatology are distinct. Though all apocalyptic literature had an eschatological interest, i.e., doctrines dealing with death, judgment and Last things. These ideas were not altogether new to the Jews. But they were widened during the post-exilic period into a world-wide scope. The end of the world would witness a deliverance of the people, and the annihilation of the world, light and darkness, and the creation of a new world.

Most strikingly of this was that the "Day of Yahweh" was no longer exclusively designated for the Jews only. It would include the gentiles of all nations as well. At the end of it all, "the kingdom of God would be recognized throughout the Universe"<sup>50</sup>

If one goes further to examine the Persian eschatology and apocalypse, one will find out that they had certain things in common with the Jewish concepts. Take for instance, the Persian teaching on the constant uncompromising antagonism between Ahura-Mazda,<sup>51</sup> and Angra Mainyu in the world which will last for a given number of years towards the end of which Zarathustra would emerge with a hope for a better world.

Somehow, miraculously, Saoshyant would be born by Zarathustra and the virgin Hvov, who would eventually be the saviour of the world towards the end the whole world was. Zoroastrianism further believed that at about that time, the dead would be raised and judgment delivered on them, and this would be followed by the annihilation of the world by fire. This would be a testing and purifying period at the end of which all would be saved.

This would precede the final conflict between Ahura - Mazda and Angra - Mainyu. They would be assisted by the angelic hosts and legions of evil spirits respectively. All powers of evil would be annihilated as a result of the final and total victory over Angra-Mainyu and his powers.

#### ii Demonology

From the aforesaid, it would be deduced therefore that demonology was an aspect of Zoroastrianism. There was no early theology on devil during the pre and exilic periods. But the Judaistic post-exilic theology had room for devil as the chief of the evil spirits called "Adversary" which the Israelites called "Satan". This relieved the early Yahwistic theology portraying Yahweh as both the author of good and evil. This influence helped the Jews to evolve the doctrine of dualism. Thus the doctrine of demonology had become a very prominent aspect of the theology of post-exilic period; and Satan did not become proper name until the post-exilic period.<sup>52</sup>

The above theological concepts have shown the various influences Judaism had from Zoroastrianism, especially on eschatology and apocalyptic teachings, and dualism. The close study of the Jewish apocalyptic especially, the non-canonical literature such as the book of Enoch<sup>53</sup> gives us a good example of eschatological beliefs.

Judaism teaches that the Lord of good would triumph over the Lord of darkness. Now that the salvation of Yahweh had been expanded by Judaism to include other nations, dualism therefore became necessary to be included in the post-exilic theology. If one takes a careful look at the exilic and post-exilic conflict between the irreconcilable two great spiritual powers of light and darkness, of good and evil; in all, it was the Lord of good who over powered satan or devil, the lord of evil.

### iii World - epochs

As regards the world-epochs, Persian eschatology divides the existence of the world into eras of thousands of years. This also finds its way into later Jewish apocalyptic from the early Israelite prophetic oracles, Yahweh had constantly reminded the Israelites of the "Day of Yahweh". This was a day not as the Jews conceived it, to be a Day of deliverance alone. Though the faithful Israel would enjoy the deliverance of Yahweh at that time, yet, for the sinful unrepented idolatrous Jews, and of course, the unrepented idolatrous sinful nations would all alike suffer Yahweh's destruction on that Day. This was seen, at least by the Israelites prophets as "World judgment". But this was not a total annihilation.



When the Israelites sinned in the wilderness at Kadesh-barnea, they were cursed. Their dead bodies were to fall in the Wilderness. This again echoes a significant theological concept in the Old Testament. Death was considered a natural phenomenon. Eschatological concept was a later development.<sup>54</sup>

In I Kings 18:36-38, we read of the prophet Elijah invoking the divine fire to consume the sacrificial altar on Mount Carmel. This had nothing to do with the world-judgment. But simply to show that Yahweh was victorious over idols, and also to prove that, in fact, Baal did not exist at all (I Kgs. 18:26-29). In Micah 1:4, we read that all mountains would melt by fire before Yahweh. It is not definite whether Micah was speaking here of world-conflagration. But with Zephaniah 1:14-18; 3:8; one will assume that there was some trace of the concept of world-great-destructive-fire ever before the exilic period, especially, the latter part of verse 18, which says that on the Day of the Lord: "In the fire of his jealous wrath, all the earth shall be consumed; for a full, year, sudden end he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth".

However, in the later Jewish apocalyptic literature, like Daniel 7:10, there had been a development over the concept of the end of the world being associated with judgment and conflagration. But with Ezekiel, there was still hope for the dead to rise and live again (Ezek. 37). This concept was greatly in accordance with the Babylonian/Persian eschatology. The passages referred to above give an idea of judgment, conflagration and a new age at the end of this world.

#### iv Resurrection

The idea of resurrection after death was connected with judgment and conflagration. From the exilic prophets (Isa. 53:12; Ezek. 37), we have some traces to believe that before the Jews were directly under Persia, they had given thought to resurrection after death. But with a close study of the later Jewish and Persian apocalypics, one would see that they were very identical in that, resurrection was now connected with the end of the world - epochs. During this great event, both Yahweh and the Persian **saviours** would feature respectively and very prominently.

In the Secrets of Enoch 33:8, we have a description of the nature of the risen body which is very close to that given in the Iranian eschatological document as follows;

Bones from the Spirit of the earth,  
 Blood from water,  
 Hairs from plants  
 Life's Vigour from fire.

Enoch has these component parts of the risen body:

His flesh from the earth  
 His blood from the dew,  
 His eyes from the sun,  
 His bones from stone,  
 His intelligence from the swiftness  
 of angels and from cloud.  
 His Veins and his hairs from  
 the grass of the earth  
 His Soul from my breath  
 and from the wind.<sup>55</sup>

There was the idea that this new body would feed after resurrection to exist immortally. Again, in Bundeshesh 30:25, and Enoch 25:4-5;8:22ff., we read of the special food which was meant for the risen body to preserve it for immortality in paradise.

Judaism preserved this eschatology and apocalypse until the emergence of Christianity. The impact of the Babylonian/Persian exile on the religion of the Jews along with other early influences lingered on in Judaism and gave rich background to Christianity in doctrine and practice.

v Acts of Praise

Other areas of influence included the Persian act of praise expressing their dualistic belief. The Jews had a liturgy which was said at dawn like that of Zoroastrianism thus:

Blessed art thou, O Lord  
 Our God, king of the Universe,  
 who formest light and  
 Createst darkness.<sup>56</sup>

It is most probable however, that the above liturgy might be a reflection over Isaiah 45:7, which says:

I form light and darkness,  
 I make weal and create woe,  
 I am the LORD,  
 who do all these things.

vi Moral God

Zoroaster further taught a moral God whose Kingdom he was to set up on earth. This follows that his adherents must be pure within as laid down in his high standard moral code.<sup>57</sup> This shows that the Persian religion was a book religion. Their concept of the existence of the divine law was personified. This is identical with the Jews' personification of eternal Wisdom (Prov. 8-9), which is identical with their Law. The above would no doubt intensify the faith of the Jews in their already acknowledged moral and righteous Covenant God, Yahweh. His Law was divine - of a highest religious and moral standard.

## 6. NOTES TO CHAPTER V

## THE DEUTERONOMIC REFORM

1. A. S. Herbert, "The Sovereignty of God in a Changing World", Qrita 111/2, pp. 94.
2. B. Linders, Reviewer, Religion in the Old Testament, R. H. Pfeiffer Theology, LXIV, No. 498, pp.510f. In his reconstruction of Josiah's reform, Linders makes it the turning point of the whole of the religious history of the Israelites. While this may be true, it is not wholly acceptable to have claimed that before 621 B.C., the Israelites knew nothing of a code of a moral conscience regulating the conduct of the individual. Truly, the idea of the covenant relationship between God and Israel was the most original and influential of the Deuteronomic reform. It was not without a background, otherwise, the importance of Sinai in the early traditions of the Israelites will be under-rated.

- 3.. The following chronological table vividly describes the seriousness of the disintegration of the united kingdom of Israel, and the subsequent quick succession of dynasties in the North. While David's and the only dynasty survived in Judah, there were ten dynasties in Israel.

B. C. 2250-2000: Approximate date for Abraham.

1750: Israel's entrance into, and settlement in Egypt.

1320: The Exodus.

#### THE MONARCHY

B.C. 1037 or 1020-1000: Saul, son of Kish, (and Samuel).

1000-961 or  
(C.1010-970) : David, son of Jesse.

961-922 or  
(C.970-931) : Solomon, son of David

NOTE: The kingdom broke up after Solomon, during the reign of his son, Rehoboam (I Kgs. 11:26-43; 12:1ff.). While Rehoboam ruled the two tribes in the South (Judah and Benjamin: I Kgs. 12:21ff., II Chron. 11:3), Jeroboam I ruled the remaining ten tribes in the North.

TABLE II

## CHRONOLOGY OF ISRAELITE KINGDOM

NO	JUDAH-SOUTH	DATE B.C.	PASSAGE	ISRAEL-NORTH	DATE B.C.	PASSAGE
1.	A. Rehoboam, son of Solomon	930-913	I Kgs. 12:1ff.	A. Jeroboam I, son of Nebat	931-909	I Kgs. 15:1ff.
2.	Abijah (Abijam) son of Rehoboam	913-910	II Chr. 13:1ff.	Nadab, son of Jeroboam	910/9-909/8	" " 15:25ff.
3.	Asa, son of Abijah	911/10-870	" " 14:1ff.	B. Baasha, son of Ahijah	909-886	" " 15:27f.
4.	Jehoshaphat, son of Asa. : co-regent with Asa : sole ruler (Elijah)	973-870 870-848	II Chr. 17:1ff. II Chr. 17:1ff.	Elah, son of Baasha (reigned hardly two years)	886-885	I Kgs. 16:8ff.
5.	-	-	" "	C. Zimri, son of Zerah; servant/commander of Elah.	(885)	" " 16:9ff.
6.	-	-	-	D. Tibni, son of Ginath, and Omri reigned independently.	885-880	" " 16:23ff.
7.	-	-	-	E. Omri, son of Baasha, commander in-chief under Elah - sole ruler.	880-874	" " " "
8.	-	-	-	Ahab, son of Omri (Jezebel)	874-853	" " 16:29ff.
9.	Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat - husband of Athaliah of the Ahab : Co-regent : Sole Ruler	854-848 848-841	II Chr. 21:1ff.	Ahaziah, son of Ahab	853-852	I Kgs. 22:51ff.



NO	JUDAH-SOUTH	DATE B.C.	PASSAGE	ISRAEL-NORTH	DATE B.C.	PASSAGE
10.	Ahaziah, son of Jehoram (Jehoahaz I) (Elisha)	841	II Chr.21:17 " " 22:1ff.	Joram (Jehoram), son of Ahab	852-841	II Kgs. 3:1ff.
11.	Athaliah, mother of Ahaziah and grand-daughter of Omri	841-835	II Kgs. 11:1ff. II Chr.22:10ff.	F. Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat. -commander in-chief under Joram.	841-814	" " 9:1ff.
12.	Jehoash (Joash) son of Ahaziah and Zibiah	835-796	II Kgs.12:1ff.	Jehoahaz, son of Jehu	814-798	" " 13:1ff.
13.	-	-	-	Jehoash, son of Jehoahaz	798-782	" " 13:9ff.
14.	-	-	-	Jeroboam II, son of Jehoash : Co-regent with Jehoash	793-782	" " 14:16ff.
15.	Amaziah, son of Joash	796-767	II Chr.24:27ff.	Jeroboam II, sole ruler	782-753	" " 14:23ff.
16.	Uzziah(Azariah), son of Amaziah : Co-regent with Amaziah : Sole ruler	791-767 767-740	" " 26:1ff.	Zechariah, son of Jeroboam - reigned six months	753/2	" " 15:8f.
17.	Jotham, son of Uzziah : Co-regent with Azariah : Sole ruler	750-740 740-732	" " 27:1ff.	G. Shallum, son of Jabesh - reigned one month.	(752)	" " 15:10ff.
18.	-	-	-	H. Menahem, son of Gadi	752-742	II Kgs. 15:14ff.
19.	-	-	-	Pekahiah, son of Menahem	742-740	" " 15:23f.
20.	Ahaz, son of Jotham (shortened form of Jehoahaz) : Co-regent with Jotham : Sole ruler	735-732 732-716	II Chr.28:1ff.	I. Pekah, son of Remaliah. - captain of Pekahiah	740-732	" " 15:25ff.
21.	-	-	-	J. Hoshea, son of Elah	732-723/2	" " 17:1ff.
22.	Hezekiah, son of Ahaz	716-687	II Chr.29:1ff.	FALL OF SAMARIA TO ASSYRIA	723/1	" " 17:6ff.

NO.	JUDAH-SOUTH	DATE B.C.	PASSAGE
23.	Manasseh, son of Hezekiah : Co-regent with Hezekiah Sole ruler	696-687 687-642	II Chr. 33:1f.
24.	Amon, Son of Manasseh	642-640	" " 33:21f.
25.	Josiah, son of Amon	640-608	" " 34:1ff.
26.	Jehoahaz II (Shallum) son of Josiah (reigned three months)	(608)	" " 36:1ff.
27.	Jehoakim (Eliakim), elder brother of Jehoahaz.	608-597	" " 36:4ff.
28.	Jehoachin, son of Jehoakim (reigned three months) Jechoniah	(597)	I Chr. 3:16,17 <sup>36:8f.</sup>
29.	Zedekiah (Mattaniah), son of Josiah	597-586	II Chr. 36:10f.
30.	*Gedaliah, the Governor, son of Ahikam-ruled for only seven months.	586/5	II Kgs. 25:22ff.

Israel the North, ceased to exist as a state henceforth, and the people lost both their political and religious identity. It was possible, however, that some very few of them were among those who enjoyed the political policy of religious toleration and restoration of Cyrus the Great, of Persia, in 539/8 B.C. But the Bible is silent about this.

FALL OF JERUSALEM 587/6-BABYLONIAN EXILE: 587/6-538 (II Chr. 36:22-23; Ezz. 1:1ff.)

Sources include:

1. G. A. Barrois, editor. "Chronology, Metrology etc." in IBC, I, pp. 145ff.
2. W. M. Clow, BREC. pp. 70ff.
3. J. Gray, editor. "Chronology of the Old Testament", in PCB. pp. 70ff.
4. J. C. Hurd, editor. "Chronology, OT" in IDB, SV, pp. 164ff.
5. H. G. May, editor. Oxford Bible Atlas, second edition, pp. 18f.

4. The prophetic oracles of the ethical prophet have been examined more specifically in chapter three section 2: "The instruments of the Covenant".
5. G. E. Mendenhall, "Covenant", IDB, p.721.

#### THE IDEA OF A NEW COVENANT

6. The Hebrew, Shaged, means almond or almond-tree. The R.S.V. renders it simply as "a rod of almond-tree". The almond analogy here is similar to the fig-tree figurative usage. It was used to portray the position of Israel in relation to the Covenant. It was used as "a figure either of religious sterility or of the punishment for unfaithfulness or hypocrisy". J. W. Wenham, "Punishment of Israel", JTB, V, Part 2, p.206f. Instances of this usage include: Jeremiah 5:17; 8:13; Hosea 2:12; 9:10-10:1 Joel 7:12; Amos 4:9; Habakkuk 3:17; Haggai 2:19; Jeremiah 24:29. According to Wenham, it may also be used to express the blessings, peace and prosperity of God as a result of Israel's faithfulness to God. For instance, I Kings 4:25; II Kings 18:31; Isaiah 36:16;

Joel 2:22; Micah 4:4; and Zechariah 3:10.

The almond-tree (or fig-tree and any other crops) failed because Israel had failed. The clearest example of this analogy is found in Nahum 3:12. See also Revelation 6:12-13.

7. J. Patterson, "Jeremiah", PCB, pp. 537ff.
8. W.O.E. Oesterley, and T. Robinson, Op. Cit., p. 220; J. Mauchline God's People Israel, pp.141f.
9. W. L. Holladay, "New Covenant", IDB, S.V. p. 623.
10. Ibid., p. 624.
11. The exact number of years of Sabbaths was 490 years, the period from Saul to the Babylonian captivity, C. 1020-538 B.C. (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10; Dan. 9:2). This was a righteous retribution for their violation of the Covenant Sabbath. The seventy years probably began during the reign of Jehoakim, C.598 B.C., when Judah was first captured, and ended with the first year of Cyrus, who in Babylon issued an edict for the restoration of the Jews (Ezr. 1:1; C. 1020-538B.C.)

12. H.C. Goerner, "The Biblical Basis of Missions, The Commission, XIV, p.3; R. Mack, "Basic Aspects of Revelation in the Old Testament", GBT, IV, pp.13ff. The concept of universalism in Deutero-Isaiah was accomplished by God through the Jews.

#### COVENANT BREAKING AND JUDGMENT

13. J. Mauchline, Op. Cit., p.93.  
 14. G. W. Anderson Op. Cit., pp. 129ff.

#### THE COVENANT IN EXILIC-PERIOD

15. For the location of Elephantine, see Sketch map III.  
 16. Tamuz was the Phoenician god-Adonis, the fertility god revered mostly by women (Ezek. 8:14).  
 17. This international socio-interaction was not new in Palestine. As earlier on indicated, in the past, it was to consolidate socio-political alliance between two countries (I Kgs. 16:31). This practice had always affected the worship of Yahweh adversely.  
 18. C.L. Timpany, A Nation in Training, p. 10.  
 19. It is not very certain, if such a religious sincerity could be undertaken by the "aliens" in Jerusalem at that time. Could there still be

sacrifice to Yahweh after the destruction of the temple? This was merely "a cult among many

20. The Aramaic Papyri were written in Aramaic and not in Hebrew. They were sixty two documents altogether, belonging to the fifth century B.C. They were all written by Jews resident in Elephantine, bearing Jewish names familiar in the Old Testament. The documents dealt with various topics, such as politics, commerce and of course religion. See W.F. Lofthouse, Israel after the Exile, IV, pp. 212ff.
21. "Anath", according to the documents, means, "the consort of Ba'al". Anath was a Canaanite goddess. This and all other forms of cult they practiced were a fusion of Yahweh and local cults. What a syncretism indeed.
22. This contained in the "Passover Papyri", one of the Yeb discoveries written on the decree of Darius to allow the Jews celebrate the feast. Another document dealt with the Egyptian hostility over the animal-sacrifice performed by the Jews. This led to the total neglect of animal-sacrifice in the Elephantine Judaism. It was a great pollution

of the Old Testament Yahwism.

23. W.F. Lofthouse, Op. Cit., p. 218.
24. J. Mauchine, Op. Cit., p. 138; M.F. Unger, UBD, p. 570.
25. The Sumerians were the non-semitic people who settled in the Tigris - Euphrates valley and founded the first Mesopotamian Civilization.
26. For example, the temples of Babylonian gods, and the Assyrian letters had similar characteristics with those of Babylonia.
27. S.H. Hooke, "Babylonian and Assyrian Religion", Chamber's Encyclopaedia, Revised New Edition, II, pp. 26f.
28. The Old Babylonian concept was that all men had personal gods who watched over them and secured their safety against demons and forces; hence the utter dependence of man on the gods in all matters in Babylonia.
29. Babylonia is referred to in the Bible as Shinar or Chaldea. Genesis 10:10; 11:2. T.A. Bryant, New Compact Bible Dictionary, p. 67, describes

Babylonia as the Greek form of "Babel".

30. Sin was the god of Ur, Abraham's City. It had a temple at Haran where Abraham traditionally set out for his journey to Canaan.
31. T. Jacobsen and J.A. Wilson, "Mesopotamian Religion", Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11, pp. 1005ff.
32. J. Mauchline, Op. Cit., p. 143.
33. Ibid., p. 142.
34. Tobit 1:10, shows that this was the religious situation of the Assyrian exiles as well.
35. Synagogue is a Greek word which means "bringing together".
36. The collection of the Priestly Code most probably commenced during the exilic period, dealing solely with worship.



37. T.A. Bryant, Op. Cit., p. 494.
38. M.F. Unger, Op. Cit., p. 918.
39. B.W. Anderson, The Living Word of the Old Testament, p. 375.

#### COVENANT IN POST-EXILIC JUDAISM

40. G.W. Anderson, The History and Religion of Israel, (THR), p. 459.
41. J. Mauchline, God's People Israel, pp. 185ff.
42. J. Bright, A History of Israel, pp. 376 and 386.

The following Chronology of Persian Kings on pp. 451f., provides the record of this period.

550-530 B.C. - Cyrus the Great.

530-522 B.C. - Cambyses

522-486 B.C. - Darius I, Hystaspes.

(490 B.C. - Marathon)

486-465 B.C. - Xerxes I

(480 B.C. - Thermopylae, Salamis)

465-424 B.C. - ARTAXERXES I, Longimanus.

(Nehemiah's visit in the **twentieth** year:

C. 445/4 B.C.

Neh. 2:1ff )

423 B.C. - ~~Xerxes~~ Xerxes II.

423-404 B.C. - Darius II, Nothus.

404-385 B.C. - ~~ARTAXERXES~~ ARTAXERXES II, Mnemon.

(Ezra's visit in the ~~seventh~~ seventh year:

C. 398/7 B.C. Ezer. 7:7)

43. J. Mauchline, Op. Cit., p. 187.

44. This Aramaic paraphrase is supposed to be the beginning of the institution of the Targums - that is, the interpretation of the Hebrew text for easy

understanding of the text by the people.

45. R.S.V. (Catholic Edition), explanatory Notes, Isaiah 56-end, contain prophecies which were probably uttered in the difficult days of the return from exile, about the year 538 B.C.
46. This policy was not peculiarly Jewish either, though it had its background in the various ancient traditions of the Old Testament. For instance, Abraham's marriage for Isaac (Gen. 24:1ff.). Isaac was not to marry from the daughters of the Canaanites. In Judges 14:1ff., Manoah forbade Samson, his son to marry from Timnah of the Philistines. This policy was considerably re-ordered in the New Testament (See I Cor. 7:12ff.), in which a believer may conditionally marry a non-believer (cf. Uncircumcised).

In Rome, for instance, marriage was confined to members of the Patrician families. This was contained in the Roman Conulecian Law of 445 B.C., which violently opposed the legitimizing of inter-marriage between Patricians and Plebeians to

avoid contamination of their blood which would in effect violate their laws of supremacy and distinction.

Also, in Athens, Pericles, in Ancient Greece at Work, by Gustave Glotz, London, (1926), p. 168, promulgated a law in 451 B.C. thus: "To be a citizen (of Athens), a man must be born of a citizen father and a citizen mother ... Otherwise their children would be impure, a bastard, a nothos". This shows that such children would not enjoy the privilege of franchise. Pericles' law was therefore against inter-marriage with non-Greeks in Athens, the way both Nehemiah and Ezra were bitter against inter-marriages in Judea at about the same time in history, to avoid both physical (national) and religious pollution.

47.

Cuneiform: According to Benton William, Cuneiform is a Latin coinage meaning "wedge, Shaped". It was used by the ancient Near East for most of their widespread writing system. The very origin could be traced back to the end of the fourth millenium B.C., by the Sumerians, south of Mesopotamia, otherwise known as the Chaldeans. It developed to involve numerous successive cultures and languages, such as the Akkadians, Assyrians, Phoenicians and Elamites. It was internationally significant as a graphic medium of civilization second only to that of the Phoenician-Greek-Latin alphabet. Cuneiform was rediscovered and developed by the old Persia in the 18th Century B.C. It was first applied by Engelbert Kampfer in about 1700 B.C. For a specimen of what a Cuneiform looked like, see Benton William, "Cuneiform Law and Writing", Encyclopaedia Britannica, II, pp. 294f.; VI, p. 972.

48.

Cyrus cylinder was a masterpiece of Propaganda. For some extracts from Cyrus' broken baked clay cylinder according to the British museum, See W.F. Lofthouse Op. Cit., p. 142; L.E. Browne, "History of Israel - II Post-Exilic", PCB, p. 128; J.B. Pritchard, The Ancient Near East, pp. 20f.

49. H.H. Rowley, "Apocalyptic Literature", PCB, p. 484.
50. A.S. Herbert, "The Sovereignty of God in a changing World", Orita, III/2, Dec. 1969, pp. 94f.
51. Ahura - Mazda, according to Zoroaster, was the "Wise Lord", God and Father and creator of the universe. This according to him dwells in Light and he created both light and darkness. Angra Mainyu, the counterpart of Ahura-Mazda is the Chief among the evil spirits called "Adversary". This will be examined further under demonology.
52. In II Samuel 24:1, God is here said to have commanded the census, but in verse 10, David said he had sinned thereby; and in I Chronicles 21:1, the census is ascribed to Satan as an infringement of God's prerogatives. According to M.F. Unger, Op. Cit., pp. 197, 594, 1182, the books of Chronicles were written by Ezra between 400-350 B.C. Though the date of Job is not certain, Unger has suggested that it was probably written during Solomonic era, or sometime before 400 B.C.

53. T.A. Bryant, Op. Cit., p. 153. The books of Enoch I and II are among the non-Canonical Jewish apocrypha books. They were various books written by various authors and circulated under "Enoch". I Enoch is dated with 163-63 B.C., and II Enoch, 1-50 A.D. Other non-Canonical books dated between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. Among such are Jubilees, Assumption of Moses, Second Esdras, Apocalypse of Baruch and Psalms of Solomon. All give revelations symbolically and Messianically of the end of the world-epochs, death, judgment, retribution, resurrection and hereafter.
54. A.S. Kapelrud, "God as Destroyer in the Preaching of Amos and in the Ancient Near East".
55. JBL, LXXI, pp. 33f., H.W. Hupenbauer, "Death, an Old Testament View", GBT, III, No. 9, pp. 10ff. Oesterley and Robinson, Op. Cit., p. 352.

(These quotations are extracts from Bundehesh 30:6, as quoted by Oesterley and Robinson).

56. Ibid., p. 274.

57. Zoroaster's dualism was undoubtedly based on the Iranian Apocalypse which teaches that Ahuza-Mazda was the highest and all good God, and Angra-Mainyu was the great spirit of evil. They were both responsible for the good and evil of the universe and the world beneath, respectively. They were always antagonising each other over the world and mankind.

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## CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION:

## THE IMPACT OF COVENANT ON ISRAEL

The saving history of Israel is the history of a people that came into being at a certain point in time, as a league of tribes united in covenant with Yahweh. Whether such tribes had been within the same camp culturally, politically or socially before the religious awareness that created them as a people, is a technical historical problem that this research has not delved into. This is so because, according to the scope of this thesis, it is the theological concept of the people in their special relationship with Yahweh that is of paramount issue.

It may be suggested however that Israel as a nation of different tribes, sometime existed as one nation, then as two nations - Judah and Israel, that is, the South and North - and finally, as a religious community. But throughout these changes, she remained as a distinctive entity in her whole national life. The distinguishing factor that made Israel unique among other peoples was her religion.

It created her society and became the controlling influence in her entire history.

While the above premise is tenable, it is also obvious that the historical origin of the people has not been all that easy to explain. The whole history with the saving experience of the people had been gradual and progressive, yet it was full of complexes of tradition. These were not only different from one another, but of diverse theological significance. However, such important records had to be organised anyway, to make meaningful successive periods, of a unique whole. The most striking decisive section of such records was the historical making of covenants by Yahweh with Israel, as his own chosen people.

Both the political and religious history of Israel, as a nation coincided. The study of the one is the study of the other. Israel was elected as a distinctive nation in a progressively revealed salvation history of the saving activities of Yahweh. The nation underwent many changes both politically and religiously. These had to do with the covenant awareness which formed the central cohesion of the total existence of the people. In all these changes, the

devout Yahwists kept Yahwism and later Judaism, perfected in Christianity, a faith which survived at all costs in the face of grave obstacles and fascinating influences.

Covenant awareness was not restricted to the Jews only. The comparative study of the Ancient Near East, especially the Hittites, shows that, there is hardly any religious community which can practise any faith or religion without solemnizing covenants. Our studies have shown that covenant is universally cherished, allowing it to saturate deeply into the cores and fabrics of human beings politically, socially, juridically and religiously.

It is thus impossible to ignore this vital institution of the whole life put together of any race, especially if its religious faith is to be reckoned with. To deny or doubt the fundamental divine election of Israel, is to argue that the Jewish religion is without a historical foundation and validity. The unique origin is based on

the bond relationship with Yahweh. Thereafter, the community and social order of the chosen people were fundamentally designed on the treaty norms. Their legal code was interwoven with their religious law, ordinances and statutes.

Yahweh was to guard, guide, and instruct them in all things, and at all times through the law and cultic leaders, such as the priests, kings and prophets. The covenant created the people as a corporate community of individuals. This body was to justify its existence by being bound in a sacred compact with God. The conception of the covenant therefore became the means of expressing the special relationship between Yahweh and Israel.

The covenant law was handed down to the Israelites to regulate their political, social, economic and religious life. Significantly enough, since then some aspects of the decalogue and the statutes have been the cardinal basis of the statutes of several nations, irrespective of their religious leaning, e.g., the British law, the Nigerian Constitution and the Shariah law.

A critical and solemn study of the covenant law, including the statutes and ordinances, easily reveals that,

God in his infinite omniscience and mercy, sought to guide his elect, and thereafter Christians, and all the universe into close fellowship and to retain his relationship with mankind. Truly, Israel was chosen as "the servant" and "the light and salt" of the world. The Law is also to foster unity, fellowship, and peaceful co-existence between all peoples of the universe under the same divine governance.

The Israelites were guaranteed freedom, security and prosperity as long as they continued to obey Yahweh and observe the covenant obligations which were laid down in the divine code. Disobedience was punished by misfortune, poverty, oppression or exile and death. The doctrine of the covenant underlay the whole theocratic and monarchic systems of the Old Testament. It was the basis of the Pentateuchal legislation, the prophetic oracles, and the Deuteronomic and Priestly editors of the inseparable national political and religious history.

Like the Hittites, the Israelites owed their ultimate allegiance to their respective local deities. Although with the Israelites, there was an inconsistent concept about the Particularism and the Universalism of Yahweh and his religion, the officials of the nation however functioned entirely within

the covenant terms. Right from the historic origin of the national faith, there was no separation of power in earnest. Joshua and the respective Judges saw themselves, like Moses, as divinely chosen servants of Yahweh to sustain the covenant relationship. Even when the monarchy was introduced, the kings, the priests and the prophets saw themselves as divine agents of Yahweh to function within the covenant injunctions. This is true of any community where covenant is held with the utmost reverence. Any policy or legislation contrary to the covenant provision was rebuffed. Thus, in spite of all the odds, obstacles and changes in the national life of the Israelites, Yahweh remained as God, and they identified themselves with him irrevocably. Let us now consider briefly, the Political and Technological, Economic, Domestic and Academic impacts of the Covenant on Israel.

#### A. Political and Technological Impact

Politically and Technologically, Israel was a developing nation. She endeavoured to be as strong, secured, and self-reliant as other nations around her. This was the primary aim behind her demand in Judges 8:22, that Gideon should rule over her. In I Samuel 8:5, 6, 20,

without mincing a word, the Israelites vehemently demanded for a king to rule over them, saying: "that we may be like all the nations".

When David became king over the whole of Israel, Hiram, King of Tyre supplied him with some building materials and provided human experts to construct his building (II Sam. 5:11). Similarly, *Toi (Tou) king of Hamath, in Syria, sent his son Joram, to David on the occasion of his defeat over Hadadezer, king of Zobah, east of Syria. David was provided with articles of silver, gold, and bronze. He dedicated these gifts along with all the other spoils that he collected from all the nations he subdued, such as Edom, Moab, Ammon, Philistia, and Amalek (II Sam. 8:9-12), to Yahweh.*

Just as he assisted David technically, to build his kingdom, so also, Hiram was helpful to Solomon. He provided him with cedar and cypress timber for his buildings. Workers with building expertise were also supplied for Solomon (I Kgs. 5:8-9). One thing is obvious; these technological developments helped Israel a great deal, to achieve rapid national growth and international recognition. Her international relations

were superb, yet, it was an overture to neglect Yahweh, and fall a prey to the adoption of foreign gods. Moreover, I Kings 9:15-22, show very clearly that even though international marriage alliances were an abomination in Israel, Solomon used this means to boost his nation's technological advancement. Pharaoh, his father-in-law, subdued Gezer and gave the city as dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife.<sup>1</sup>

Solomon also subjected to forced labour and slavery, all other subdued people, such as the Amorites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites and Jebusites. This was not a violation of the covenant terms. But it is clearly indicated in I Kings 4:26-28; 5:13-18, that in fulfilment of the highlights of the Monarchy in I Samuel 8:10-18, Solomon subjected his co-Israelites to forced-labour, burden-bearing, and the hewing of stone. All these violations of the covenant obligations culminated in the disastrous end of Solomon's reign. God forsook him, and he suffered economic bankruptcy. Opposition was raised against him all over from south, north and within. His kingdom was eventually split into two during the reign of his son, Rehoboam, (I Kgs. 11:23-39).



I consider any philosophic, economic, political, or scientific undertaking in which God could not be discovered as the primary and ultimate source of man's achievements, as a futile exercise.

B. The Economic Impact

The economic forms of life in Israel were "a social institution". The Jews lived an entirely agricultural mode of life. The land which they cultivated belonged to Yahweh. The crops they planted were made productive by his divine providence. The herds they reared were blessed by him; hence the first born and the first fruits belonged

to him. When Israel failed to recognize Yahweh as her God, or failed to worship him or accord him his due rights, then the land suffered economic setback.

After the Babylonian exile, in about 520 B.C., God punished Israel with a great economic hardship. God said:

You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill: you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages earns wages to put them into a bag with holes.

(Haggai 1:6)

The cause of this economic mess was that Israel neglected their covenant responsibility to worship Yahweh, and build him a temple (Ezr. 3:8-13; 4:21-24; Hag. 1:2; Zech. 1:2ff., Ezr. 5:1ff.; 6:13-15). Even though, they were comfortable in their homes by God's providence, yet, they refused to rise up and build a house for Yahweh! This situation made God withhold the dew in the heaven, and the earth also withheld its produce. He called for drought upon the land, the hills, the grain, the new wine,

the oil, men and cattle, and all their labours.

In I Kings 17:1; 18:1; God brought drought upon Israel for about three and a half years, and the Israelites suffered untold famine and hardship. This was because they violated the covenant law which forbade idolatry. Israel had gone after Baal and all sorts of abominations.

God says categorically, in Malachi 3:6, that he does not change. He never violated the God-Israel covenant relationship. It was Israel that constantly robbed him by not carrying out her own part of the **covenant terms**.

Hence God says:

You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me; the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house; and thereby put me to test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil; and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. Then all nations will call you blessed,

for you will be a land of delight,  
says the LORD of hosts.

(Hag. 3:9-12)

### C. Domestic Impact

The covenant law made adequate provision for healthy family life within the Israelite society. Concerning marriage, it was an abomination for a Jew to marry a non-Jew. In Genesis 24, Abraham solemnly warned his servant not to take a Canaanite as wife for Isaac, his son. He therefore went to Nahor, in Mesopotamia where Rebekah was brought to Isaac in marriage. Similarly, according to Genesis 27:41-28; 9, both Jacob and Esau were not to marry from among the Canaanites.

In an attempt to promote political international alliances, King Solomon stubbornly violated the covenant law which forbade Israelites to enter into marriage with any foreign national. He married the daughter of Pharaoh Pseuiness II (I Kgs. 3:1, 19:16). Moreover, he married from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon and the Hittite empire (I Kgs. 11:1-8, 33). God's charge to him in I Kings 2:1-4; 3:5-15; 9:1-9, was ignored. These foreign women turned

his heart away from the God of Israel. He was guilty of apostasy. Yahweh therefore rejected him. His kingdom was torn into pieces. Ten tribes, the larger part of his domain, were given to his rival neighbour, Jeroboam. The other two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, were retained for his son, Rehoboam, in order to maintain David's dynasty in fulfilment of God's promise with David (II Sam. 7; I Kgs. 8:17-19).

In Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Divorce was permitted in the Old Testament on account of "hardness of heart"; but Jesus categorically insists, in Matthew 19:7-9, that this was not in the original plan of God. According to Mark 10:4-9, Christ contends that God's original purpose was for the couple to live together till death separated them: "What God has joined together, let not man put assunder" (Mk. 10:9). However, since in Israel, any one guilty of unchastity was to be stoned to death (Ex. 20:14; Lev. 20:10-16; Deut. 5:18), the only cause for which divorce could

be allowed, according to Christ, was on the ground of unchastity (Matt. 5:32. See also Leviticus 18:6-19, 24-30).

D. Academic Impact

Academic institutions are of paramount importance in nation-building. They are training grounds, to provide necessary inevitable manpower needed for all spheres of the development of the nation.

The patriarchs did not undergo any formal educational training, but their wandering in the wilderness gave them much experience and knowledge of the developed ancient world with whom they interacted. These are reflected in their social and religious institutions. But most important was their knowledge of the Law, the Statutes, Ordinances and Testimonies of Yahweh, which put them in the

front line among nations. The covenant obligations guarded and guided them all through. Joshua was strictly warned to abide by his knowledge of the law of Yahweh in order to succeed in his new career (Josh. 1:8). David solemnly warned Solomon (in I Kings 2:1-4) to act diligently within the knowledge of God's law. The Prophet Ahijah quickly cautioned Jeroboam about this vital factor to his success on the throne of Israel (in I Kings 11:38).

Post-exilic Judaism provided formal educational training in the synagogue on the Law of God, as championed by priests and rabbis. Proverbs 1:7, 9, 10, says: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, ... wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight". When Jeremiah took up the question of the new covenant, his optimism was that no teacher would be needed to instruct people about the knowledge of God, since this would have been written upon their hearts (Jer. 31:33-34).

All the Jewish kings, judges, prophets, priests, Rabbis, Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Sanhedrin, Apostles and other Jewish sects and parties were academicians in their own rights. They all contributed enormously in educating the nation, in their own respective periods, to stand by the covenant bond between them and Yahweh.

## NOTE TO CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION: THE IMPACT OF COVENANT ON ISRAEL

1. This practice of dowry payment was strange to Israel. In Egypt, the Ancient Near East, and Asia, this was a common practice. It was the bride's parents that paid dowry to their daughter, or to the bridegroom. The reason for this was that the parents were giving the share of family-inheritance to their daughter who was leaving her parental home, to build her own new home.

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