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Covenant and Justification in the Old Testament

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The Lutheran World Federation convention at Helsinki in 1963 was not able to reach agreement on a formulation of the doctrine of justification. This lack of agreement, it is said, does not imply disagreement regarding the doctrine itself, but it resulted from the inability to formulate or present this basic teaching of Scripture to modern man in such a way as to speak to him in terms that are relevant and pertinent to him. This difficulty arises, it is said, particularly because modern man no longer asks Luther's question: "How do I find a gracious God?" but asks: "Is there a God?"

Can the Old Testament help us in this predicament? On the face of it, going back to the Old Testament should only aggravate the situation. If the Reformation formulation of this doctrine is outmoded in the 20th century, if the *New* Testament teaching makes no sense to modern man, what can we hope to achieve if we go back still further into the past, to a culture and way of life that is even more remote from us and more foreign to us? Above all, justification in the Old Testament is contingent upon fulfillment of its promises in the New Testament.

But if nevertheless it is true that "these things," i. e., the Old Testament, "were written for our learning," as St. Paul says of the needs of religious instruction for his day, it may prove helpful for us to draw upon the Old Testament for insights

that come to us from that more distant perspective. All the more, when St. Paul specifically bases the doctrine of justification on the Old Testament and says: "But now the righteousness of God without the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." (Rom. 3:21)

Paul in this passage does not merely quote isolated passages from the Old Testament to support his teaching of justification by faith, but asserts that "the Law and the Prophets" (the entire Old Testament) may be called upon to establish, explain, clarify, make relevant this central doctrine. In this connection the present writer feels that the meaning of the righteousness of God became clear to Luther in reading and expounding the Psalms.

If the Old Testament is to serve us in a similar way, we should of course let it do so on its own terms and in its own context. We are suggesting that we will let the Law and the Prophets witness to us of "the righteousness of God without the Law" if we first of all find the focal point of the Old Testament in the covenant concept. Once we have established this focus, we will be better prepared to see the lines proceeding from this central point, like so many radii, to the all-embracing circle of justification by faith.

Many Biblical scholars warn against any effort of uniting the various strands of the Old Testament into one unified theme. They believe that it cannot be done with-

out pulling some of the threads so violently that they will snap and thus lose their own historical and originally intended connections. The Old Testament, they say, defies systematization or schematization under one dominating concept. Fully aware of the multiplicity of the Old Testament thought and its unfolding during long ages of history, we suggest that it will be helpful to find our way through the Old Testament if we gather its many and variegated parts under the one guiding concept of the covenant.

I. THE COVENANT

There is good precedent for embracing all of the Old Testament under this central theme. The title page of our English Bible says that it consists of "the Old and New Testaments." The term "Testament" is derived from the Latin word *testamentum*, which Jerome had used as one equivalent in the Vulgate (4th century) to translate the Hebrew and Greek words for covenant. It came to be applied to the two major parts of the Bible by the early Latin and Greek church fathers (perhaps beginning in the third century).

When a collection of writings therefore is called a testament or covenant, these terms designate the documents in which the covenanted agreement and relationship is on record. The first group of documents is called the Old Covenant. They tell of what preceded and was absorbed, fulfilled, and transcended by a New Covenant, documented in a second series of writings and therefore called the New Testament.

There is also Biblical precedent for the use of the word "covenant" as a comprehensive term. Jesus Himself called the relationship which He established between

God and man a covenant and thus summarized the purpose of His whole life and the significance of His death by this one word. He connected all that God had done and promised to do of old in and through Him when He said of the cup of Holy Communion: "This is the blood of the new covenant." (Luke 22:20; Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; cf. Luke 1:72)

In 2 Cor. 3:14 we are told of people who "read the old covenant" (KJV, Testament), but do not understand its intended meaning. In this instance Paul is quite clearly referring to a group of writings and their contents. They tell of the covenanted relationship of God to His people of old which, however, has meaning and final validity only if it is understood as a promise of the covenant confirmed by Jesus Himself.

In these documents, which Paul calls the Old Covenant, the same term occurs to subsume all that God did and promised to do in order that a saving relationship between Him and mankind might be established. Jeremiah says: "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" (31:31). By referring to the coming framework of God's saving acts as a new covenant, the preliminary era of God's revelation of grace is designated in a summary way as the old covenant. (Cf. Is. 54:10; 55:3; 61:8)

But the term "covenant" is used in the Old Testament not only to denote in a summary way that God has initiated and is carrying forward a unified program to bring mankind back into a peaceful and blessed relationship with Him. It also describes various specific saving acts of

God during this period as the establishment of a covenant relationship with man.¹

Like the idiomatic expressions of all languages, the term "covenant" in the Old Testament took on a wider connotation. It was used not only of the act of covenanting but also of the terms of the covenant, its provisions, its statutes, and requirements (cf. 2 Kings 18:12; 1 Kings 11:11). In some instances it seems to lack the mutuality of an agreement inherent in a covenant and the freedom of the contracting parties to refuse to enter an agreement, as for example, in Deut. 4:13: "And He [God] declared to you His covenant which He *commanded* you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and He wrote them on two tables of stone." Joshua 7:11: "Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them." Our English word therefore hardly reflects all its nuances and connotations.

The Old Testament begins by portraying man created in a blissful and perfect relationship with his Maker. This relationship is not described in Gen. 1—3 as based on a covenant. It came to a tragic end,

¹ The Hebrew word בְּרִית, translated "covenant," occurs 286 times in the Old Testament. It is used to designate an agreement also between human beings, individuals as well as groups. There was a covenant between Jonathan and David (1 Sam. 20; cf. Gen. 26:28, 29). Kings made covenants with other kings and with the people (1 Kings 20:34; 1 Sam. 11:1; Ezek. 17:16-18). The etymology of the Hebrew word "covenant" has not been established definitely. It may be a form of a root meaning "a cutting," that is, the cutting of a sacrificial animal in the ceremony to initiate, sanction, and ratify the covenant (cf. Abraham, Gen. 15). The Hebrew idiom used 286 times for establishing a covenant is literally "to cut a covenant." Another suggestion links its derivation with the eating of a meal as a validating ceremony of the agreement.

however, when Adam and Eve violated the terms of the relationship which God had established for them and which they, as His creatures, were to recognize. Many years later the prophet Hosea speaks of the rebellion of Israel against God in his own day and says: "Like Adam they transgressed the covenant." (Hos. 6:7; so Luther; RSV, "as Adam"; KJV, "like men")

Not many chapters after the account of man's fall, the term covenant is expressly used of God's dealings with men. After the Flood, God promised never again to "destroy every living creature" as He had done and then adds: "Behold, I establish My covenant with you and your seed [descendants] after you and with every living creature that is with you." (Gen. 8:21; 9:9, 10)

God's promises to Abraham are repeatedly cast in the form of a covenant: "I will make My covenant with you" (Gen. 17:2). Thereby God set forth the basis for the return of mankind to the blessed relationship with Him which had been lost through sin. For with Abraham He made an "everlasting covenant" (Gen. 17:7) so that in him and his "seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). Abraham became a partner of this covenant by accepting its promises in faith. He expressed that acceptance and faith by obeying the commands of God and by circumcising all male offspring of his house as "a sign of the covenant" (Gen. 17:9-14). Isaac and Jacob received similar promises of God although they are not explicitly given in the form of the covenant.

The promises made by "the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Ex. 3:6) were imple-

mented in the covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. Because God had established His covenant with the patriarchs "to give them the land of Canaan," He will now deliver their descendants from the bondage of Egypt and "bring them into the land which He swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." (Ex. 6:2)

The new element in God's unfolding plan of salvation was that the bearers of His promises and the participants in His covenant now had become a nation. "Now therefore if you will obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My own possession among all people; for all the earth is Mine, and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Ex. 19:5, 6)

New also for the expression of the relationship that God established with this chosen nation was the elaborate framework of specifications within which Israel was to function as the covenant nation. When Moses "took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people," they accepted these provisions and said: "All that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will be obedient." The covenant was sealed when Moses took the blood (of the sacrificial oxen) and threw it upon the people and said: "Behold, the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you in accordance with all these words" (Ex. 24:7, 8; cf. Heb. 9:19-22). The succeeding chapters of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy elaborate on these terms of the covenant and tell the story of how God brought His people to the border of the land promised in His covenant with the patriarchs and with Israel at Mount Sinai.

Because Israel was created to be a cov-

enant nation, it had no history apart from this established relationship. It conquered the land flowing with milk and honey because God was faithful to His promises of the covenant. It was defeated when it sinned against the covenant of God. God sent "His servants, the prophets," to call Israel back to covenant loyalty. Because she stubbornly refused to live as a covenant nation, she experienced the chastening hand of God in defeat and exile. Still faithful to the covenant that He swore to Israel's fathers, God continued after the exile to use the chastened and broken remnant of the nation as the means in and through which the promises of the new covenant were to be realized. His covenants with Abraham and Israel were to pave the way for the coming of the Mediator of the new covenant. Because Jesus Christ took away the sins of the world, all the promises of God's previous covenants are Yea and Amen.

Two questions arise as we attempt to find the overarching theme of the Old Testament in the covenant. The first is: Does the term "covenant" really express everything that the entire Old Testament has to say of God and man? The second is: Does the covenant concept actually constitute the basic theme of every book of the Old Testament?

It will help to answer both questions if we first recognize that the covenant is a concept borrowed from human relationships to describe God's dealing with His fallen creature. Like all human terms and concepts, it can be applied to God's action only by way of an imperfect analogy. This caution is particularly true of the connotations of the word "covenant" in modern usage. We inevitably think of a covenant

as an agreement which the contracting parties negotiate as free agents and which represents a settlement that is mutually beneficial. In Old Testament times there were such covenants between individuals and between groups of people. But the ancient Hebrews also knew that the term "covenant" could be used to denote the arrangement that an overlord made with his vassals. In such instances the overlord stipulated the terms to which his subjects merely agreed.² This type of suzerainty covenant may be more adequate to describe God's covenanting with men. We notice, for instance, that the Old Testament is very careful to say that God made the covenant with man and never that man made the covenant with God.³

But even the ancient meaning and usage of the word "covenant" did not make it a fully adequate term to describe what God was doing for man and how man was to respond to what God had done. The Israelites had to be told times without number that this covenant was not a bilateral agreement but that its establishment was solely the result of God's initiative and mercy. Man was in no position of bargaining with God on any terms. Be-

² Cf. George Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *Biblical Archeologist*, XVII (September 1954), 50—76.

³ When man is said to make a covenant with God, it means merely that he is pledging himself to a keeping or renewing of the existing covenant (cf., e. g., 2 Chron. 34:31). The English word "testament" also indicates that the testator is a free agent in assigning his possessions to the heirs whom he selects, and the heirs are bound to observe his disposition of the property to which they have no claim without its provision. But the English word is inadequate on other scores. The covenants of the Old Testament were not a last will and testament.

cause of his revolt against God he could not even appear in His presence.

Similarly the potential response of man to the covenant is in no way the basis for the establishment of the covenant. What man might do in keeping the covenant did not move God to take this action. His only purpose was to give man what all man's effort could not produce: a life, a communion, with God that he had forfeited. The covenant is bilateral only in this sense that man will give evidence of his acceptance of the covenanted gift by an inward and outward life that is motivated by a complete surrender of self to the God of the covenant.

Israel's besetting sin — and whose is it not? — was to refuse to accept these basic noncontractual principles of the covenant. Pride caused the breaking of the first covenant of God with man, and pride continued in the sons of Adam to pervert God's intentions expressed in the succeeding covenants. There was the inborn and constant temptation to regard the covenant as bilateral and of presuming to be partners of the covenant on equal terms with God. Even the most imperfect attempts to observe the requirements of the covenant were regarded by man as putting him into a bargaining position with God. Thereby the covenant was broken at its most basic point. For man was no longer responding to God's sovereign gift of a covenant status with Him, but was attempting through the covenant to coerce God to man's advantage. It was the deadly inversion of making man the creator rather than the receiver of life. Such a person placed himself outside the saving circle of the covenant.

Furthermore, in a human contract the law is satisfied if the parties to it demon-

strate in an observable manner that they have complied with the agreed stipulations. The Israelites perverted God's covenant also on this score by limiting its demands on them to an outward, and therefore a partial, compliance with some of its terms. The covenant stipulations regarding worship and sacrifice were particularly liable to such abuse of the covenant. God had to make it clear again and again that the performance of rites and sacrifices was not a keeping of the covenant. In fact, this error was so deep-seated (again, is it not so even today?) that some of God's messengers had to employ very drastic language to uproot it. What they said in some instances seemed to imply that sacrifices were not even a part of the covenant program. But by restricting his response to the covenant to some outward deeds, man again made the covenant itself null and void. No less was required than the surrender of man with all his heart and all his soul and all his mind to the God of the covenant. Only if sacrifices were an expression of the inner participation of man in the blessings of the covenant could they be part of the covenant at all.

The Sinai covenant was made with the one nation. This distinction tempted Israel to be proud and to give way to the delusion that God was bound to His people by His promises, regardless of their behavior. In the minds of many He became a national God, whose existence was dependent upon the services of worshipers.

The covenant concept then was liable to these and other misinterpretations. Like all analogies drawn from human language and institutions, it needs to be hedged about with reservations to safeguard it against abuse.

But the question is still very pertinent: Does this concept summarize all that the Old Testament wants to tell us about God and man? Is it the central theme of the Old Testament? Does everything at every point fall in place under this concept as its elaboration, result, clarification, or goal?

If the theme of the Old Testament is the covenant, then its ultimate purpose is to tell what God did to establish a relationship between Him and man. Its first pages make clear that nothing was more necessary, for man had shut himself off from God. Being without God is death in a most absolute sense.

But God came to the rescue of His forlorn creatures. He announced and began to put into effect a plan whereby man might be reunited with Him. It is like a covenant because it demonstrates that a new relationship is established and exists. It is like a covenant also because God binds Himself as in a contract to very definite promises and man agrees to accept these promises on terms as set forth in a covenant.

The covenant concept therefore can be said to absorb into itself the whole story of man's redemption. It opens history as the great arena of God's mighty deeds to meet man's desperate needs. It is the magnetic pole which gathers all the fragments of history about it and gives them structure and meaning. It reveals the sovereign plan of God to take millennia of our time to work out His plan of salvation. It shows how man could live in communion with Him during that long period on the basis of His covenant promises. It directs the gaze to the future when God's promises will no longer be in the form of an old covenant but will be ful-

filled in the new covenant. It reaches forward to a paradise restored in which the peace of a new heaven and a new earth will reign.

The covenant concept also teaches man what he needs to know, accept, and do if he is to be reunited with God. It assures him that he does not have to fear the whims of an arbitrary deity. It tells him that he does not have to placate some personalized force of nature if he is to survive (Baalism). The covenant proclaims that God is a person who seeks a personal relationship with His creature. Man can rely on the provisions of the covenant; God's mercy does not change, nor does His power wane.

But the terms of the covenant also make it very clear that man can do nothing to bridge the gulf between himself and God. It is only the forgiving mercy of God that can span this chasm of sin. To be a partner to the covenant is to believe that God provides this bridge of forgiving mercy. There can be a return to God, a communion with Him, only if man in faith walks across the abyss of his guilt on the overarching promises of God's grace in the covenant.

In the moment of faith and submission, men became the beneficiaries of all the promises that constituted God's covenant. But throughout the Old Testament men were directed to look forward in faith to the time when God would be "in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Cor. 5:19 RSV). Not all the details of this final redeeming act of God were delineated in advance in the promises. Men of the old covenant "searched and inquired . . . what person or time was indicated by

the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory" (1 Peter 1:10, 11 RSV). But it was clear that what sinful man could not do, God would do Himself in the Woman's Seed, in the Seed of Abraham, in the Messiah, in the Man of Sorrows, upon whom was "the chastisement that made us whole." (Is. 53:5)

The covenant concept, finally, ties together all the prescriptions and regulations that bulk so large in the Old Testament dispensation and that have led many to stigmatize the Old Testament as the religion of the Law. Their purpose, however, was to teach that, in a restored relationship with God, man's one concern will be to recognize and to express the total claim of God on him. There is no aspect or area of life that man can withhold from God; there is nothing secular or even neutral for those in this covenant. The Sinai covenant supplied many outward forms in which man's inner life and communion with God was to express itself. As soon as the new covenant would come in the economy of God's revelation, those external teaching devices will have served their pedagogical purpose and will no longer be necessary.

Let no one suppose, however, that freedom from temporary form and prescribed ceremony in the new covenant diminishes or reduces the totality of the believer's response to God. There are no areas in his inner or outer life that are permitted to remain uncommitted. Every failure to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:44) is a violation of the covenant and is proof of the need of the atoning blood of the Mediator of the new covenant.

But granted that the covenant concept may be regarded as the common denominator of the revealed religion of the Old Testament, we still must ask the second question: Does every book of the Old Testament actually mention and expound the covenant as the basic and controlling theme of its content?

We will not get very far in reading the Old Testament before we find that the covenant concept apparently does not play a significant role in a number of the books. The Book of Judges, for example, tells us how Israel, after the death of Joshua, repeatedly did "evil in the sight of the Lord," how God as a punishment "sold them into the hands" of their enemies and then delivered them from their oppressors after their repentance. But the covenant is not mentioned in the recurring formulas that constitute the framework of the book. The same holds true of the structure of succeeding historical books, such as the books of Samuel and Kings.

We will also find that the covenant is not explicitly developed as the basic theme of most prophetic books. The word does not even appear in the writings of such prophets as Amos,⁴ Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, or Haggai.

The situation is no different in the so-called Wisdom literature. The many ethical maxims and directions of the Book of Proverbs do not build on the covenant relationship as the motivation for a wise God-pleasing life (the word "covenant" occurs only once in the Book of Proverbs, 2:17). Job cannot understand why God treats him as He does, but he does not

attempt to find the solution of his problem in terms of a relationship to God explicitly established by a covenant. In the 150 Psalms the word "covenant" occurs only 20 times.

These examples suffice to raise the question whether the covenant concept will actually be an aid in understanding the various books of the Old Testament.

But where the covenant concept is not expressly mentioned or developed, we are justified in asking whether it is not necessary for that very reason to supply it as the key to the meaning of a book. Such "supplying" need not be importing a foreign element into it or forcing the contents into a Procrustean bed.

As we have seen, the covenant, a term denoting and defining arrangements between man and man, is used to set forth all that God has pledged Himself to do so that man can return to God and live in a peaceful relationship with Him. Because of its inherent connotation of mutuality, it is useful at the same time to make clear how man is to respond if this relationship with God is to exist. The terms of the covenant constitute the basis of the entire God-man and the man-God relationship. God vows to be bound to an everlasting covenant of mercy and lets man know that life with Him is possible on no other terms than a response of faith and faithfulness. If this is true, if the covenant establishes a basis for all of God's dealings with man as well as a criterion for all of man's reaction to God, should not one expect the "thus saith the Lord" of every book of the Old Testament to move within the orbit of these two inseparable axioms? Should not the message of every book be understood in the

⁴ Amos 1:9 mentions a covenant of brothers and therefore does not speak directly of a relationship to God.

framework of the principles so set forth in the covenant?

Let us return to those books, mentioned above, in which the term "covenant" either does not occur at all or is not explicitly made the basis or theme of the contents. In the Book of Judges the recurring cycle of action (rebellion on the part of Israel, oppression by foreigners, repentance, deliverance by the judges) is thematically introduced by the sentence "The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" (3:7; 7:1; 6:1, etc.). Only if the reader bears in mind that a standard of good and evil has been fixed in the covenant will the plot of the whole book cease to be a riddle. In the second chapter such a key to the structure of the book is given explicitly in the words "because this people have transgressed my covenant." (2:20; cf. vv. 1, 2)

The same holds true of the Book of Kings. Here the author reviews four centuries of Israel's history from Solomon to the Babylonian Captivity. In summarizing the reign of the various kings the author includes the thematic phrase "he did [or did not] what was right in the eyes of the Lord, his God." Such an approval or condemnation presupposes that the author has in mind a criterion for his evaluation and that the reader likewise is familiar with it. At times the covenant and its terms are explicitly mentioned as the determining factor. Toward the end of Solomon's reign we are told that he "did evil in the sight of the Lord" (1 Kings 11:6), because he had failed to comply with what was "written in the Law of Moses" (1 Kings 2:3). The finding of "the book of the covenant" at the time of King Josiah some 300 years later resulted in a renewal of the covenant

and the pledge "to walk after the Lord . . . to perform the words of this covenant" (2 Kings 23:2, 3). King Hoshea and the Northern Kingdom fell a prey to the Assyrian invader "because they did not obey the voice of the Lord, their God, but transgressed His covenant, even all that Moses, the servant of the Lord, commanded." (2 Kings 18:12)

The Book of Proverbs approves of the "wise" and rejects the "foolish." As we have seen, this wisdom and folly is not expressly defined by or related to the covenant. "The beginning of wisdom" is, however, said to be "the fear of the Lord." Whatever the term "fear of the Lord" means, it must suggest to the reader that the Israelites knew on what basis the Lord was to be feared. Without the blessings and cursings of the covenant, the many maxims of ethical behavior lack validity and motivation in the "fear of the Lord." What the reader must keep in mind, if he is not to misinterpret these proverbs, is explicitly stated at least once: "the loose woman 'forgets the covenant of her God.'" (Prov. 2:17)

In the Book of Job the covenant of God with man is not mentioned at all (although the word "covenant" occurs three times). Job's problem arises from his failure to understand why God treats him as He does. It soon becomes evident that Job assumes that God is not acting as he had reason to expect God to act. Job seeks to harmonize his misfortunes with promises of blessings on the obedience of faith to which God stood committed in His covenant with Abraham and which later were reiterated at Sinai in such terms as "showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My com-

mandments" (Deut. 5:10). Job receives no answer except the reminder that the good that God has obligated Himself to dispense is not to be determined according to human standards. God's wisdom knows what serves man's best interest; His power brings it about.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes the word "covenant" does not occur at all. Life is portrayed as a meaningless "vanity of vanities" unless man knows that there is a Creator, who is to be remembered from one's youth (12:1), and that there is a God who "will judge the righteous and the wicked" (3:17). The reader is certainly understanding the book correctly if he resorts to the covenant to supply the content of what man is to remember and to provide the basis upon which God judges who is righteous and who is wicked.

The prophetic books likewise rely on the covenant to supply their meaning. Every exhortation of sin, every threat of punishment, every call to repentance, every promise of a gracious forgiveness that is found in these books is left hanging in midair unless it has a basis in the covenant. The reader will notice no basically different viewpoint in the required responses to God on the part of man or in the promises of God to man in those prophetic books which develop the concept of the covenant explicitly (Jeremiah, Ezekiel) and in those books in which the covenant is supplied or presupposed. Books like Obadiah and Jonah deal with noncovenant nations. But only Israel's position as the covenant people gives point and purpose to their message. Edom, says Obadiah, will not succeed in its evil designs against Israel because Israel is "My people" (v. 13). Nineveh's response to Jonah's preaching makes the

refusal of Israel, the covenant and chosen nation, to repent all the more reprehensible. The servant motif in Isaiah presupposes Israel's failure to achieve the purpose that God had set for the covenant people and makes clear the need of an atonement to reestablish a reconciliation with God.

The covenant is mentioned only in psalms 25, 44, 50, 55, 74, 78, 83, 89, 105, 106, 111, 132. But the confession of sin (51), the expression of doubt (73) or of confidence in God (23), the praise of God's steadfast love, and all the other poetic outpourings can be and must be accounted for by the fact that God has established a relationship with man to which he responds with expressions of joy, of doubt, of adoration, of praise, of worship. Some psalms (136) recount the great deeds of God by which He made Israel the covenant nation. Others (119) praise the Law of God, His precepts, testimonies, and statutes — all contained in and known from the covenant.

In the same way the covenant concept will be found helpful in supplying the meaning of all the books of the Old Testament. The reader can assume that the authors themselves are fully aware of their relationship to God as it is defined in the covenant made with their fathers and that they are writing for people who are in, or should return to, the covenant relationship with God. Here then is the thread which marks the way through the 39 books called the Old Testament. It will lead us to the point where the New Testament picks up that thread. In the first chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke, Zachariah prophesied that in the birth of his son, John, the Lord God of Israel had taken the first steps "to remember His holy cove-

nant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham." (Luke 1:72, 73)

It will also help us remain on this central highway through the Old Testament if we watch for expressions and terms that clearly are correlatives of the covenant. Some of these have lost their original covenant connotation in the process of translation. The Hebrew word רַחֲמִים is usually rendered "mercy" in the KJV. The RSV stresses an essential aspect of this word by translating it in almost all instances with "steadfast love." It is steadfast because God does not swerve from the promise made in the covenant. Applied to God, it expresses confidence that He will keep His pledged mercy; applied to man, it stresses man's need to respond faithfully to the terms of God's covenant of love with him. As an example we may refer to Ps. 136, in which the sentence "For His steadfast love [KJV: mercy] endures forever" occurs as a refrain in each of its 26 verses. The word "covenant" does not occur in this psalm, but it supplies the woof for the poet's thread of praise.

The covenant basis is often hidden under the word frequently translated by "truth" in the KJV. It usually means being faithful to a promise as rendered in the RSV. Other expressions of the Old Testament that have a direct connection with the covenant are: God remembers, God keeps His oath, God is holy, God is faithful; Israel forgets, Israel is unfaithful, the righteousness of God.

The unifying element of the Old Testament has been sought in other concepts. We shall note a few. In his *Alttestamentliche Theologie auf religionsgeschichtlicher Grundlage* (Leipzig, 1933), Ernst Sellin stresses the holiness of God as the central

theme of the Old Testament. "God is holy. Herein we touch on that which is the deepest and inmost essence of the God of the Old Testament. Here we are dealing not with one divine attribute amongst others, but closely joined to 'life' and 'spirituality' with His real being, in its inmost core. The Gospel of Jesus Christ attaches itself directly to this faith in the holiness of God and is built on it" (p. 22). A more popular book (*Understanding the Old Testament* by J. E. Fison, London: Oxford Press, 1952) has these chapter headings: The Holy Land, The Holy City, The Holy Place, The Holy Bible, The Holy People, etc., and ends with a chapter entitled "The Holy Child, the Messiah."

Ludwig Koehler finds the Lordship of God to be the nerve center of the Old Testament. "That God is the Lord who gives command is the one and fundamental pattern of the theology of the Old Testament" (*Old Testament Theology*, trans. A. S. Todd [Philadelphia, 1958], p. 11). "Religion in the Old Testament is the relation between command and obedience" (p. 17). "God forgives as Lord and saves as the Lord of the Community." John Bright (*The Kingdom of God*) suggests that we can understand the Old Testament if we keep in mind that its central theme is the kingdom of God.

No doubt all of these and others should be kept in mind as important strains in the polyphony of the Old Testament. They stress vital aspects of the Old Testament. But all of the relationships expressed in these are also inherent in the covenant theme or can be considered a development of it. None of them appears to be used in the Old Testament itself to summarize its content and meaning.

Finally, we should point out that the covenant is a unique feature of the Old Testament and thus distinguishes it from the other ancient religions. In none of them is the covenant concept developed to the point where it ties together all the strands of religious thinking and living. The God of the Old Testament alone was capable of doing so. As we have seen above, the covenant presupposes not only a personal deity but above all a God who as the Creator and Lord of history speaks and acts for man's salvation. The heathen gods, on the other hand, were mere personifications of forces of nature and could not emerge as free agents to direct history and to make it *Heilsgeschichte*.

It may be for the purpose of stressing the difference between the God of the Old Testament and the idols that other human analogies to express God's relationship to man are not found in a more highly developed form in the Old Testament, such as father and son, husband and wife, king and subject. Among Israel's neighbors these very concepts were indispensable in explaining their perverted religion and degrading practices. When the Old Testament uses them, they are safe from abuse as long as the covenant controls their meaning.

II. THE RELEVANCE OF THE COVENANT FOR JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH

If this covenant concept embraces everything that is basic to the theology of the Old Testament, how does it relate to the doctrine of justification through faith, the doctrine by which, according to our Lutheran heritage, the church stands or falls?

The answer is that in the Old Testament covenant and justification are concepts that

move in correlative meaning in the same orbit. One explains and supplements the other. The presuppositions and terms of the one can be substituted for the other. The difference is merely this: They use different analogies from human experience and understanding to make clear what God has to say about Himself and man. But therein lies also the advantage of having two concepts to express the same divine message. Each undergirds, explains, defines the other from the point of view of a different human institution or procedure. What God does in the one instance is like being partner to a covenant. What God does in the other case is like the pronouncement of a judge on the basis of the covenant. But both are designed to achieve the same result.

It is true that justification is not used as a term to denote God's entire plan of salvation as He lets it unfold in the history of His people. There is an old covenant and a new covenant; but the adjectives "old" and "new" are not applied to justification to summarize the entire *οἰκονομία* of God's plan of salvation.

Nevertheless, the lines of correlation between the two concepts can readily be traced.

1. Both covenant and justification denote that a relationship exists between God and man.

In the covenant concept this aspect of righteousness is inherent in the very term. By means of a covenant two or more people establish a relationship and determine how one is to be related to the other: they enter into an agreement. Covenant tells us what God does in His relationship to man as man's partner in a contract.

Justification also establishes a relationship between God and man. But in this concept it is the righteousness of God that goes into action as the determining factor. Because of what God does, man can be and is right with God. The righteousness of God therefore is not primarily the quality of justice in God—it is that, too, of course—but it is the activity of God, and it results in a bond with man upon which God passes the judgment “It is right.”⁵

How closely related these concepts are is indicated by the fact that Jeremiah (9:24) speaks of God as the Lord, “who practices steadfast love [דִּסְדִּי], justice [מִשְׁפָּט], and righteousness [יְדִי].” There is almost a mixing of metaphors when God says that the wicked shall not enter His righteousness, as if it were the covenant which they should not enter: Ps. 69:28: “let them [the enemies] not enter into Thy righteousness.” (Cf. Ps. 32:10, 11; 48:9, 10; 98:2, 3; 103:17, 18; 36:10; 33:5)

2. The basis for the establishing of God's relationship with Israel in terms of the covenant is identical with the presuppositions according to which God declares that His righteousness creates a relationship with Israel that meets all requirements

⁵ Hermann Cremer, *Die paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre im Zusammenhange ihrer geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1900), p. 34: “Righteousness (יְדִי) is entirely a relationship concept.” The same on p. 335: “N. T. righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) is and remains a relationship concept and expresses that a person meets the requirements that the relationship establishes.” Edmond Jacob (*Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958], p. 95) says: “Righteousness is always a concept of relationship . . . and action more than a state.”

of justice, all demands of what is right and just.

In both instances the human concepts break down as full analogies of what goes on between God and man. God as a covenant Partner is not involved in a pact between equals that is mutually beneficial. Israel merely agrees to receive what God agrees to give. Likewise when God is described as establishing a relationship of righteousness, Israel has no right to expect to be dealt with on the basis of judicial justice. God justifies the unrighteous.

God constantly reminds Israel that it is in partnership with Him, as we have seen, because He took the initiative and elected or chose Israel. There was nothing in Israel to deserve being singled out as the recipient of God's election love. It remains a mystery how God can say to Israel: “I have loved you . . . and I hated Esau.” (Mal. 1:2, 3)

Likewise Israel owes its relationship of righteousness to the prior act of God's elective love. He gives His covenant people the Promised Land, not because He could on a judicial basis declare Israel righteous. “Not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart are you going in to possess their [Canaanites'] land [i. e., in comparison with the Canaanites]. . . . Know therefore that the Lord, your God, is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness; for you are a stubborn people.” (Deut. 9:5, 6 RSV)

As this relationship of righteousness came into existence as a free act of God's mercy, so God maintains it on the same basis. Just as God keeps the covenant promises open to all who break the covenant but want to return to live as re-

ipients of its stipulated mercy and forgiveness, so He does not cease to let Israel be right with Him if Israel appeals to His righteousness by which He justifies the unrighteous.

If God were to do what is right in human judicial procedure, the situation would be hopeless. In God's instructions to the judges in Israel He says: "You shall not justify the guilty, 'for I will not justify the wicked'" (Ex. 23:7). Therefore every Israelite has to pray: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified" (Ps. 143:2). All Israel had to admit: "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Is. 64:6). The sentence of the judge could only be the execution of the legal requirement: "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of the Law to do them." (Deut. 27:26)

Israel knew what its righteousness should be. Moses had told them: "And it shall be our righteousness if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord, our God, as He hath commanded us." (Deut. 6:25)

And yet the same psalmist who pleads with God: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified," appeals to the righteousness of God: "Hear my prayers, O Lord; give ear to my supplications; in Thy faithfulness answer me and in Thy righteousness" (143:1). What God does when He lets the unjust stand in His judgment is therefore described as the application of God's righteousness. It appears paradoxical that Israel should seek a way out of its predicament by appealing to the righteousness of God and ask that God execute

judgment in His righteousness. So the prophet Micah says: "I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against Him, until He plead my cause and execute judgment for me. He will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold His righteousness." (7:9; cf. Ps. 65:3,5)

Israel can dare to invoke this righteousness of God in its behalf only because it rests its case on the promise of God that He will do the right thing in keeping His part of the covenant. God entered into an agreement with His people on the basis that He would not let justice prevail in His relationship to them but be merciful and gracious, forgiving transgression and sin. The person who has no right has, as a covenant partner with God, the right to hold God to His agreement to be righteous, that is, to acquit him. The righteousness of God is the covenant God in action; He "practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness" (Jer. 9:24). Because He keeps the covenant His righteousness never ceases: "My righteousness shall be forever, and My salvation from generation to generation." (Is. 51:8)

Every unrighteous person who thus is righteous by appealing to the righteousness of God has every reason to praise God that he is righteous. He knows he is righteous and that his own imperfect keeping of the covenant is nevertheless made right and acceptable to God. Why should such a person not glory in such a righteousness and even boast of it to the glory of God? After David has the assurance that God has blotted out his transgressions, washed him thoroughly from his iniquity and cleansed him from his sin, he says: "My tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness" (Ps. 51:14). After the penitential

outpourings of the penitent sinner in Ps. 32, comes the confident cry of liberation: "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." (V. 11)

But only the righteous, who through the covenant are right in their relationship to God, can expect justification from the righteousness of God. All those who are not in this covenanted relationship with God must expect God's righteousness to be just that. According to this righteousness, He gives the sinner what he deserves, the outpouring of His wrath upon unconfessed and unforgiven sin.

Therefore a just person also has the covenanted right to ask God to vindicate his just cause in his life, to justify him also in his relationship to such as remain unrighteous because they refuse to seek the forgiving righteousness of God. The righteous have the right to expect God not to permit these unrighteous to interfere with God's gracious purposes and goals in the individual life of the just person as well as in the course of the covenant people as a whole. "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength; even to Him shall all men come, and all that are incensed against Him shall be ashamed. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified and shall glory" (Is. 45:24, 25). The imprecatory psalms are the expression of the forgiven just sinner that he is right with God and that He will come to the aid of his righteous cause. It is the obverse of his conviction that he does not have a claim on anything but the forgiving righteousness of God. After the persecuted righteous person has declared: "O God, thou knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from Thee," he nevertheless knows

that he can appeal to God to uphold his right against the unrighteous and say: "Add iniquity unto their iniquity, and let them not come into Thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living and not be written with the righteous." (Ps. 69:5, 27, 28)

This sovereign Lord, whose righteousness acquits the unrighteous, is able to enforce His judgments of righteousness; He has the power to vindicate His cause and the course of the righteous. To underscore this characteristic of the Judge, the God of Israel is described as a king with unlimited resources. The kingdom of God is His righteousness as He puts into effect what He has promised to those who have come into the right relationship with Him on the basis of His covenant of grace and as He hinders and thwarts every evil counsel and will which would not let His kingdom come.

All the other expressions of God's relationship to man — that of father and husband — are merely variations of the analogy expressed in the judicial terminology of the righteousness of God. What He does as Judge, He does as Father and Husband, and for the same reasons.

3. So far we have stressed righteousness as God's action, as what He does in the relationship that He has established when He justifies the ungodly. What part does man play if this relationship is to exist?

Just as in the covenant God does everything and man has nothing to make him eligible as God's partner, so there is nothing that man can do to qualify him for the verdict of righteousness. And yet man is involved. He must be because every relationship requires reciprocal attitudes, actions, and obligations.

God enters into a covenant with man and exercises His righteousness to establish and maintain this relationship only with the man of humble and contrite heart. God's righteousness gives man what man has no right to demand or to expect, and it is not available or accessible to man unless man seeks it in the conviction that it is a gift of mercy and grace. Before Israel could say: "Judge me, O God," it had to say: "Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified" (Ps. 143:2). The righteousness of God excludes every claim to self-righteousness and every thought of receiving justice.

How does man enter this relationship so that he, the unrighteous, is right with God? What does he do to remain in this relationship? He must enter it on the terms that God has established if it is to exist. He must take God at His pledged word, trust God's covenanted grace, and cling to His promises of mercy and forgiveness. This unquestioning confidence in God, this steadfast appeal to God's faithfulness, is the Old Testament's way of saying that Israel believed in God.

A clear example of this justification through faith in the Old Testament is Abraham. By taking God at His word, by clinging to the promises made in God's covenant with him, by believing, he is credited with the right relationship with God, that of righteousness.

Israel is exhorted to cling to these promises of God when, to outward appearances, God has forsaken those who are in the right relationship to Him (Hab. 2:4 RSV): "The righteous shall live by his faith." If he perseveres in his conviction that he is right with God, he can lead a

triumphant life, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding.

Furthermore, in the righteousness which God provides, the righteous, because he has accepted it, may boast of it as his righteousness and thus, in a sense, be self-righteous. "The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands He recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord and have not wickedly departed from my God." (Ps. 18:20 f.)

But there is another aspect of man's part in the relationship that God established in the covenant and expressed in terms of justification. We have just said that man does nothing to establish the right relationship with God; he is completely passive. But *in* this relationship when he is right with God, he becomes very active in the right way; when he enters a righteous relationship that God has made possible, he acts righteously. There should be no aspect of what he thinks, says, or does that remains unaffected and ungoverned by his participation in the covenanted grace of God. The Old Testament very clearly states that "he is righteous who gives to God and man what the relationship to them, his communion with them, demands."⁶

God does not leave him uninformed how he is to act in this relationship. In the old covenant it is spelled out in great detail and in very specific instructions. There is no area of his life that does not come into consideration. What he thinks, what he eats, how he prays, how he worships, how he treats his fellowman—all these will be colored by the fact that he is righteous. Any failure on his part to act thus or to do so from any other motive breaks the

⁶ Cremer, p. 52.

relationship with God. It is a repudiation of the grace of God by which he is justified.

But even when man fails to express his relationship to God as he should, God does not break off His gracious relationship with man. Although man is unfaithful, he can rely on God's faithfulness to remain gracious. He still justifies the ungodly if in penitent remorse they plead for pardon and appeal to the unfailing mercy of God. After every lapse and return to God, Ezekiel says (18:22): "He shall live in the righteousness which he does."

Paul was therefore correct in saying that the righteousness of God is witnessed in the Old Testament. It has a focal point, as Paul also says, in the covenant that God made with Abraham. He took hold upon the promise of God, he acted on it, he lived in obedient response to it, he *believed*, and thus he was in the right relationship to God; "it was counted to him as righteousness."

THE COVENANT AS AN AID IN THE PRESENT DISCUSSION OF JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH

Is there any advantage in going back with Paul to the Old Testament to understand the doctrine of justification through faith? Does it help us in our attempt to make this doctrine relevant today and to state it in terms that will meet the needs of 20th-century man? A few points deserve our attention.

1. First of all, there is some comfort to be derived from the perspective of the Old Testament in the frustration which many seem to experience as they try to make this doctrine meaningful today. God and His prophets did not succeed any better in making this doctrine acceptable to "the

man in the street." The long centuries of Old Testament history are the story of Israel's rejection of its position as God's covenant people whom He justifies. God finally had to destroy the nation of His choice for the simple reason that it did not want to be His people on His terms, the terms of justification through faith.

The point is that this rejection of God was just as blatant and absolute by man in a prescientific age. Not knowing the Einstein theory or the composition of the universe, in both its macrocosmic and microcosmic dimensions, did not make this doctrine any more acceptable to the Israelite, who knew so little of the wonders of God's creation in comparison with our age.

In fact, Israel's rejection of justification through faith may be said to begin where it begins today—in the question: Is there a God who wants to enter into a personal relationship with man? The science of that day, the philosophy of Baalism, said there is no personal God; the forces of nature represent the deity. God was depersonalized and made the sum total of the energies that cause the change of seasons, that produce rain and drought, that bring about the fertility in field, flock, and family. In their own foolish, prescientific way they said, There is no God—no personal God with whom I must establish a personal relationship.

The parallel to man's denial of a personal God today should be quite clear. Israel's neighbors mythologized God into a combination of impersonal forces. Modern skeptics mathematicize, syllogize, abstract, philosophize Him into a similar unknown quantity of energy. Naturally the righteousness of God, who justifies the un-

godly, is foolishness to these modern Canaanites who insist that all knowledge is located in the laboratory or summarized in a syllogism.

2. Not all Israelites were atheists of this kind. Some let God remain a person, but one who was nonexistent nevertheless, because they constructed Him out of the stuff of their own thoughts. God had to remind Israel constantly that the only God by whom they could hope to be delivered from a hopeless existence, from the annihilation of His wrath, is a God whom they had no right to approach, whom they could not placate, without whose grace and mercy they were exposed to His verdict "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Without the justifying righteousness of God they were lost. How hard this doctrine went down in Israel's day! How many curses upon all unrighteousness stud the pages of the Old Testament! How drastic the language of denunciation of Israel's guilt! Israel stoned its prophets who proclaimed this prerequisite for the right relationship to God.

And is not this our problem today? The self-righteousness and the self-sufficiency of modern man is the great barrier to his understanding the doctrine of justification by faith no matter how one formulates it or expresses it. He feels no need of such a doctrine. Is our difficulty today that we preach the grace of God to people who are not ready for it because they do not know that they are without a God who justifies them? Must we not lead people again to Mount Sinai and with Israel tremble and fear before the fire of God's presence?

Peter Brunner in an article in *Lutherische Monatshefte* (1962, pp.106—116) supports the necessity of preaching sin, the

curse of sin, the enormity of sin, if the message of justification through faith is to have meaning for man today. To break through the complacency of modern man's self-righteous pride, he must be led to confess: "The basic direction of my life's drive is not toward community with God. I live in covenant with *myself*, but not in covenant with God. . . . God uncovers me as a person, who has broken the covenant of His love not only by this or that deed, but has broken it already by the basic direction of his existence and with all powers and to the extent of all his capabilities." He goes on to say that the word of God must be used "to lay bare such a prelogical horizon of the breaking of the covenant." And the Word of God that achieves this end is the Law.

It was Paul's problem, too, before his experience on the road to Damascus. He was one of those who, "going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). He was "touching the righteousness of the Law blameless," at least in his own eyes, until he learned to count all this as dung. (Phil. 3:6-9)

3. The Old Testament also witnesses in no uncertain terms to the fact that the righteousness of God establishes a relationship that involves a reciprocity. The Old Testament stresses what the New Testament calls the obedience of faith to such a degree that at times we could get the impression that good works are the basis of God-pleasing righteousness rather than man's response to it. Would not this Old Testament emphasis come as a good antidote to our present-day tendency to regard the grace of God as cheap? Would

it not be a good thing if we today took up the challenge contained in the boast of the Old Testament saints that their hands are clean and their conscience pure?

The grace of God, His bestowal of righteousness, His covenant love, cannot be spurned with impunity. Joshua 23:16: "When ye have transgressed the covenant of the Lord, your God, which He commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them; then shall the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which He hath given unto you." (Cf. other warnings of God against breaking the covenant: Deut. 17:2; Joshua 7:11, 15; Judg. 2:20; 2 Kings 18:12; Deut. 31:16-18: "And the Lord said unto Moses: Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, and this people will rise up and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land whither they go to be among them, and will forsake Me, and break My covenant, which I have made with them. Then My anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day: Are not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us? And I will surely hide My face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought in that they are turned unto other gods.")

The Old Testament affords us the opportunity to see in the lives of individuals and in the history of the whole nation that God's gift of righteousness demands more from people than mere lip service. To spurn the love of God exposes man to His wrath, as we see it coming on the unrighteous

of the Old Testament, blow after blow.

4. From the Old Testament we may also derive a corrective to a false mysticism which appears to becloud our teaching of justification through faith. In relating the *Christus pro nobis* to the *Christus in nobis* there seems to be a tendency to make of the indwelling of Christ something that approaches a biological union, at least a fusion of our spirit with the spirit of Christ.

The Old Testament is far too realistic and concrete to support any notion that the relationship of the justified person to God develops into a merging of the human and divine personalities. The God who condescends to enter into a personal relationship with man in the covenant remains a partner to the covenant distinct and different from man. The God who justifies the ungodly never loses His sharp profile and identity when He gives His righteousness to the sinner.

Israel misunderstood and misinterpreted its relationship to God in many ways, but it was never tempted to bridge the distance between God and man by ignoring or spiritualizing it. The emphatic, unmistakable, and repeated emphasis in the Old Testament on the transcendence of God, His holiness, His wholly otherness, and on the fear of the Lord made it quite clear to Israel that when God entered a covenanted relationship with Israel, man's response did not reduce God to a component part of man's spirit. Man's faith in God's promises and his clinging to them is indeed something that man can do only with the help of God, but what God does and what man does with the help of God never merge to the point where they are not dis-

tinct. When man breaks the covenant, the breach is not healed by a renewed coalescing of the Spirit of God with the spirit of man. Man can only pray: "Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me." It is the Creator that established a covenant of grace and righteousness with His creature. The Old Testament shouts out: Let God be God, and don't make Him the expression or the experience of the creature's spirit.

5. The Old Testament's proclamation of the justifying action of God's righteousness as the result of the covenanted promises of His grace may also shed some light on what our dogmaticians have called subjective and objective justification. God's offer to let men live in a forgiven and saving relationship is always there independent of man; it exists regardless of man's response to it. But the Old Testament also stresses just as insistently that man remains ungodly, cursed, the object of God's destroying wrath unless he actually enters the covenant and becomes a partner to it. He does not create the covenant, but to become righteous he must accept its promise and live as the recipient of its blessing. He never responds in perfect obedience of faith; he continues to break the covenant. But the forgiving mercy of God always stands ready to declare him righteous if he holds God to His covenanted agreement of forgiveness.

6. There may be other aspects of the teaching of justification by faith in the Old Testament that may help to throw light on this doctrine. One more consideration should be added. As we have seen, the covenant and the righteousness of God are basically expressions of the same action of God, merely described on the basis of two different human analogies of relationship. As in other respects, they also have this in common that they portray the irruption of God's rule as King among men and the carrying out of His purposes. Both make clear on what basis He wills men to live under His rulership. Both also emphasize that God will "hinder every evil counsel and will which will not let His kingdom come."

When Paul therefore operates primarily with justification through faith, he is merely saying the same thing that the gospels portray with the concept of the kingdom of God. In both, the relationship of God to man and of man to God is basically the same. Each permits its own nuances and emphases, but each reaches back into the Old Testament. Here God initiated His rule by entering a covenant with man in which He justifies the ungodly who accept His mercy. In the blood of the new covenant all the promises of God have their Yea and Amen.

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