TREATY OF THE GREAT KING

The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy:
Studies and Commentary
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Studies and Commentary

by

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This book is dedicated to the memory of NED B. STONEHOUSE
PREFACE

The rediscovery of treaties of the great kings of Near Eastern antiquity has been widely exploited by biblical scholarship in the last few years. It has been generally recognized that certain adjustments are required in the negative judgments which control modern studies in the area of Old Testament history and higher criticism, but it does not yet seem to have been appreciated that in these treaties the modern biblical critic has a tiger by the tail. The significance of the treaties for subjects like the beginnings of the canon of Scripture and the authenticity of the Pentateuch as well as the historicity of various covenants recorded in the Bible can hardly be overestimated. An attempt is made here to trace the relevance of the recovery of the treaty form for our understanding of the nature of the Deuterogue and Deuteronomy, with particular reference to the current phase of Old Testament higher criticism.

If not as much in the foreground as the apologetic design in the present volume, the biblical theological aspects of these investigations nevertheless occupy a more central position in the interests of the author. It is intended that the studies should serve as a preliminary probe, preparing for a more systematic exploration of the history of the revelation of God's covenants with man.

The two chapters of Part I first appeared as articles in the *Westminster Theological Journal* in the issues of May, 1960 (Vol. XXII, No. 2) and November, 1960 (Vol. XXIII, No. 1). The original articles have been somewhat modified, particularly to take account of important, more recent developments. The brief commentary on Deuteronomy found in Part II is substantially that which I contributed to *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962). The purposes and policies of that volume naturally determined the general nature and scope of the treatment of the individual contributions, as well as matters like the system of transliteration of Hebrew and Greek words and the form of biblical quotations. The latter are from the Authorized Version unless otherwise noted.

Although this combination of materials is somewhat unusual, it was felt that the two parts satisfactorily supplemented each
other in their common unfolding of the suzerainty treaty pattern as found in the Mosaic covenants. By means of the commentary the results of the studies of Part I may be made more serviceable to the immediate needs of the preacher and teacher of the Bible; yet, because of the commentary's primary and constant concern with questions of structure, whether the pattern of the treaty as a whole or the arrangement of materials within subordinate sections like the stipulations, it is hoped that it may in this respect at least serve those with more specialized interests.

The opportunity is welcomed to acknowledge with deep appreciation the generosity of the Moody Press and also the kindness of the editors of the Westminster Theological Journal in granting republication privileges. My thanks are also due to Miss Dorothy Newkirk for her services in preparing the typescript. And to the publishers, the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, belongs my sincere gratitude for their bravery in accepting the work of a new author and for their many subsequent courtesies.

* * * * *

Within the month Westminster Theological Seminary has suffered great loss in the departure of Professor Ned B. Stonehouse to be at home with the Lord. We younger members of the faculty first knew him as teacher and when it became our further privilege to serve with him as colleagues we continued to seek and treasure his wise counsel on many matters, personal and professional. How fresh the memory of the warm encouragement which Dr. Stonehouse added to his advice when I sought his judgment on the publication of this my first book.

"So teach us to number our days, that we may get us a heart of wisdom."

—Meredith G. Kline

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Part I

The Treaty Form of The Decalogue and Deuteronomy
1. The Two Tables of the Covenant

"And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone" (Deut. 4:13).

It has been commonly assumed that each of the stone tables contained but a part of the total revelation proclaimed by the voice of God out of the fiery theophany on Sinai. Only the subordinate question of the dividing point between the "first and second tables" has occasioned disagreement. A re-examination of the biblical data, however, particularly in the light of extra-biblical parallels, suggests a radically new interpretation of the formal nature of the two stone tables, the importance of which will be found to lie primarily in the fresh perspective it lends to our understanding of the divine oracle engraved upon them.

Attention is being directed more and more in recent years to the remarkable resemblance between God's covenant with Israel and the suzerainty (also called vassal) type of international treaty found in the ancient Near East. Similarities have been

1. The dominant opinion has been that the "second table" opens with the fifth commandment, but Jews usually count the fifth commandment as the last in the "first table", filial reverence being regarded as a religious duty. (Here and elsewhere in this chapter the designation of specific commandments is based on the common Protestant enumeration.) For a different ancient Jewish opinion anticipating the conclusion of the present study see Midrash Rabbah, XLVII, 6.

2. See G. E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," The Biblical Archaeologist, XVII (1954) 5, pp. 50-76; this was republished in Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East, 1955. D. J. Wiseman had previously read a paper on some of the parallels to the Society for Old Testament Studies (Jan. 1948). See now K. Bâlitzer, Das Bundesformular. Seine Ursprung und seine Verwendung im AT (Wiss. Monogr. 2. A. und N.T., 4), Neukirchen, 1960. There are references to such international treaties in the third millennium B.C. Actual treaty texts of the New Hittite Empire in the full classic form of the mid-second millennium B.C. were discovered almost forty years ago in the archives of ancient Hattusa. The evidence for this period has been supplemented by a few treaty fragments found at Ugarit. Other recent finds bring the evidence for vassal treaties down into the first half of the first millennium B.C. Most significant are the three Aramaic inscriptions from Sedeh and the Assyrian treaties of Esarhaddon found at Nimrud.
discovered in the areas of the documents, the ceremonies of ratification, the modes of administration, and, most basically of course, the suzerain-servant relationship itself. On the biblical side the resemblance is most apparent in the accounts of the theocratic covenant as instituted through the mediatiorship of Moses at Sinai and as later renewed under both Moses and Joshua. Of most interest for the subject of this chapter is the fact that the pattern of the suzerainty treaty can be traced in miniature in the revelation written on the two tables by the finger of God.

"I am the Lord thy God," the opening words of the Sinaitic proclamation (Ex. 20:2a), correspond to the preamble of the suzerainty treaties, which identified the suzerain, or "great king," and that in terms calculated to inspire awe and fear. For example, the treaty of Mursilis with his vassal Duppi-Tessub of Amurrum begins: "These are the words of the Sun Mursilis, the great king, the king of the Hatti land, the valiant, the favorite of the Storm-god, the son of Suppiluliumas, etc."73

Such treaties continued in an "I-thou" style with an historical prologue, surveying the great king's previous relations with, and especially his benefactions to, the vassal king. In the treaty just referred to, Mursilis reminds Duppi-Tessub of the vassal status of his father and grandfather, of their loyalty and enjoyment of Mursilis' just oversight, and climactically there is narrated how Mursilis, true to his promise to Duppi-Tessub's father, secured the dynastic succession for Duppi-Tessub, sick and ailing though he was. In the Decalogue, the historical prologue is found in the further words of the Lord: "which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Ex. 20:2b). This element in the covenant document was clearly designed to inspire confidence and gratitude in the vassal and thereby to dispose him to attend to the covenant obligations, which constitute the third element in both Exodus 20 and the international treaties.

There are many interesting parallels to specific biblical requirements among the treaty stipulations; but to mention only the most prominent, the fundamental demand is always for thorough commitment to the suzerain to the exclusion of all

alien alliances. Thus, Mursili insists: "But you, Duppi-Tessub, remain loyal toward the king of the Hatti land, the Hatti land, my sons (and) my grandsons forever . . . . Do not turn your eyes to anyone else!" And Yahweh commands his servant: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3; cf. vv. 4, 5).

Stylistically, the apodictic form of the Decalogue apparently finds its only parallel in the treaties, which contain categorical imperatives and prohibitions and a conditional type of formulation equivalent to the apodictic curse (cf. Deut. 27:15-26), both being directly oriented to covenant oaths and sanctions. The legislation in the extant legal codes, on the other hand, is uniformly of the casuistic type.

Two other standard features of the classic suzerainty treaty were the invocation of the gods of the suzerain and (in the Hittite sphere) the gods of the vassal as witnesses of the oath and the pronouncing of imprecations and benedictions, which the oath deities were to execute according to the vassal's deserts.

Obviously in the case of God's covenant with Israel there could be no thought of a realistic invocation of a third party as divine witness. Indeed, it is implicit in the third word of the Decalogue that all Israel's oaths must be sworn by the name of Yahweh (Ex. 20:7). The immediate contextual application of this commandment is that the Israelite must remain true to the oath he was about to take at Sinai in accordance with the standard procedure in ceremonies of covenant ratification (cf. Ex. 24).

Mendenhall finds no reference to an oath as the foundation of the Sinaiic covenant; he does, however, allow that the oath may have taken the form of a symbolic act rather than a verbal formula. But surely a solemn affirmation of consecration to God made in the presence of God to his mediator-representative and in response to divine demand, sanctioned by divine threats

5. Anciens Near Eastern Texts, p. 204.
6. There is a formal literary approximation to the invocation of the oath witnesses in Deut. 4:26; 50:19; and 51:28 where by the rhetorical device of apostrophe God calls heaven and earth to be witnesses of his covenant with Israel. Heaven and earth are also invoked along with the mountains and rivers, etc., at the close of this section in the treaties. Cf. Matt. 5:54, 55; 23:16-22.
against the rebellious, is tantamount to an oath. Moreover, Israel's eating and drinking in the persons of her representatives on the mount of God (Ex. 24:11) was a recognized symbolic method by which people swore treaties.  

The curses and blessings are present in Exodus 20, though not as a separate section. They are rather interspersed among the stipulations (see vv. 5, 6, 7, 11, and 12). Moreover, an adaptation of the customary form of the curses and blessings to the divine nature of the Suzerain who here pronounced them was necessary. Thus, the usual invocative form has yielded to the declarative, and that in the style of the motive clause, which is characteristic of Old Testament legislation and which is illustrative of what may be called the reasonableness of Israel's Lord.  

There is one final point of material correspondence between Exodus 20 and the secular treaties. It provides the key to the nature of the two tables of stone and to this we shall presently return. The parallelism already noted, however, is sufficient to demonstrate that the revelation committed to the two tables was rather a suzerainty treaty or covenant than a legal code. The customary exclusive use of “Decalogue” to designate this revelation, biblical terminology though it is (cf. “the ten words,” Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4), has unfortunately served to obscure the whole truth of the matter. That this designation is intended as only pars pro toto is confirmed by the fact that “covenant” (bêrit; Deut. 4:13) and “the words of the covenant” (Ex. 34:28) are alternate biblical terminology. So, too, is “testimony” (‘êdût; Ex. 25:16, 21; 40:20; cf. II Kgs. 17:15), which characterizes the stipulations as oath-bound obligations or as a covenant order of life. Consequently, the two

9. Cf. B. Gemser, “The importance of the motive clause in Old Testament law,” Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, I (1953), pp. 50-66. It must be borne in mind that the Decalogue does not stand alone as the total revelation of the covenant at Sinai. For curses and blessings see also the conclusion of the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 23:20-33) and especially Deuteronomy 27-30.
10. The contents of the treaties are also called the “words” of the suzerain.
11. ‘êdût is related to the Akkadian addê, which is used as a general appellation for the contents of suzerainty treaties. Wiseman (op. cit., p. 81), defines addû (sing.) as “a law or commandment solemnly imposed in the presence of divine witnesses by a suzerain upon an individual or people who have no option but acceptance of the terms. It implies a solemn
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tables are called “the tables of the covenant” (Deut. 9:9, 11, 15) and “the tables of the testimony” (Ex. 31:18; 32:15; 34:29); the ark, as the depository of the tables, “the ark of the covenant” or “of the testimony”; and the tabernacle, where the ark was located, “the tabernacle of the testimony.”

The two stone tables are not, therefore, to be likened to a stele containing one of the half-dozen or so known legal codes earlier than or roughly contemporary with Moses as through God had engraved on these tables a corpus of law. The revelation they contain is nothing less than an epitome of the covenant granted by Yahweh, the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, to his elect and redeemed servant, Israel.

Not law, but covenant. That must be affirmed when we are seeking a category comprehensive enough to do justice to this revelation in its totality. At the same time, the prominence of the stipulations, reflected in the fact that “the ten words” are the element used as pars pro toto, signalizes the centrality of law in this type of covenant. There is probably no clearer direction afforded the biblical theologian for defining with biblical emphasis the type of covenant God adopted to formalize his relationship to his people than that given in the covenant he gave Israel to perform, even “the ten commandments.” Such a covenant is a declaration of God’s lordship, consecrating a people to himself in a sovereignly dictated order of life.

But what now is the significance of the fact that the covenant was recorded not on one but on two stone tables?

Apart from the dubious symbolic propriety of bisecting a treaty for distribution over two separate documents, all the

charge or undertaking on oath’ (according to the view of the suzerain or vassal)."

12. There does appear to be some literary relationship between the legal codes and the suzerainty treaties. J. Muilenburg (“The form and structure of the covenantal formulations,” Vetus Testamentum, IX (Oct. 1959) 4, pp. 347ff.) classifies both under “the royal message.” Hammurapi in his code, which is still the most complete of the extant ancient Oriental codes, introduces himself in the prologue with a recital of his incomparable qualifications for the promulgation of laws, then presents the laws, and in the epilogue pronounces curses and blessings on future kings as they ignore or honor his code. The identity of the Decalogue with the suzerainty treaties over against such law codes is evidenced by features like the covenant terminology, the add character of the stipulations, the “I-thou” formulation, and the purpose of the whole as manifested both in the contents and the historical occasion, i.e., the establishment of a covenant relationship between two parties.
traditional suggestions as to how the division should be made are liable to the objection that they do violence to the formal and logical structure of this treaty. The results of the traditional type of cleavage are not two reasonably balanced sets of laws but one table containing almost all of three of the four treaty elements plus a part of the fourth, i.e., the stipulations, and a second table with only a fraction of the stipulations and possibly a blessing formula. The preamble and historical prologue must be neither minimized nor ignored because of their brevity for this is a covenant in miniature. In comparison with the full-scale version, the stipulations are proportionately as greatly reduced as are the preamble and the historical prologue. That would be even clearer if the additional strand of the curses and blessings were not interwoven with the commandments. Certainly, too, there was no physical necessity for distributing the material over two stones. One table of such a size that Moses could carry, and the ark contain, a pair of them would offer no problem of spatial limitations to prevent engraving the entire text upon it, especially since the writing covered both obverse and reverse (Ex. 32:15). In fact, it seems unreasonable, judging from the appearance of comparable stone inscriptions from antiquity, to suppose that all the area on both sides of two tables would be devoted to so few words.

There is, moreover, the comparative evidence of the extrabiblical treaties. Covenants, such as Exodus 20:2-17 has been shown to be, are found written in their entirety on one table and indeed, like the Sinaitic tables, on both its sides. As a further detail in the parallelism of external appearance it is tempting to see in the sabbath sign presented in the midst of the ten words the equivalent of the suzerain's dynastic seal found in the midst of the obverse of the international treaty documents. Since in the case of the Decalogue the suzerain is Yahweh, there will be no representation of him on his seal, but the sabbath is declared to be his "sign of the covenant" (Ex. 31:13-17). By means of his sabbath-keeping, the image-

13. Cf., e.g., Wiseman, op. cit., plates I and IX.
bearer of God images the pattern of that divine act of creation which proclaims God's absolute sovereignty over man, and thereby he pledges his covenant consecration to his Maker. The Creator has stamped on world history the sign of the sabbath as his seal of ownership and authority. That is precisely what the pictures on the dynastic seals symbolize and their captions claim in behalf of the treaty gods and their representative, the suzerain.

These considerations point to the conclusion that each stone table was complete in itself. The two tables were duplicate copies of the covenant. And the correctness of this interpretation is decisively confirmed by the fact that it was normal procedure in establishing suzerainty covenants to prepare duplicate copies of the treaty text.

Five of the six standard sections of the classic suzerainty treaty were mentioned above. The sixth section contained directions for the depositing of one copy of the treaty document in a sanctuary of the vassal and another in a sanctuary of the suzerain. For example, the treaty made by Suppiluliuma with Mattiwa states: "A duplicate of this tablet has been deposited before the Sun-goddess of Arinna . . . In the Mitanni land (a duplicate) has been deposited before Tessub . . . At regular intervals shall they read it in the presence of the king of the Mitanni land and in the presence of the sons of the Hurri country." Enshrinement of the treaty before the gods was expressive of their role as witnesses and avengers of the oath. Even the vassal's gods were thereby enlisted in the foreign service of the suzerain.

Similar instructions were given Moses at Sinai concerning the two tables. They were to be deposited in the ark, which in turn was to be placed in the tabernacle (Ex. 25:16, 21; 40:20; Deut. 10:2). Because Yahweh was at once Israel's suzerain and God of Israel and Israel's oath, there was but one sanctuary for the depositing of both treaty duplicates. The spec-

15. Cf. Kozolec, op. cit., pp. 100-101. On a stele from Ras Shamra an oath-taking ceremony is depicted with the two parties raising their hands over two copies of the treaty (Ugaritica III, plate VI).
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ised location of the documents as given in Hittite treaties can be rendered "under (the feet of)" the god, which would then correspond strikingly to the arrangements in the Israelite holy of holies.\(^\text{18}\) The two tables do not themselves contain instructions concerning their disposition, for the legislation regarding the ark and sanctuary had not yet been given. The same is true of the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 20:22-23; 33). But it is significant that when such legislation was given after the ceremony of covenant ratification (Ex. 24), the ark was the first object described in detail and directions for depositing the two tables in it were included (Ex. 25:10-22).

As for the further custom of periodic public reading of treaty documents, the contents of the two tables were of course declared in the hearing of all Israel and the Book of the Covenant was read to the people as part of the ratification ceremony (Ex. 24:7); but the practice of periodic proclamation was first formulated some forty years later in the Book of Deuteronomy when God was renewing the covenant unto the second generation. When suzerainty covenants were renewed, new documents were prepared in which the stipulations were brought up to date. Deuteronomy is such a covenant renewal document; hence its repetition with modernizing modifications of the earlier legislation, as found, for example, in its treatment of the Decalogue (5:6-21) or of the Passover (16:5ff.; cf. Ex. 12:7, 46).\(^\text{19}\) Another case in point is Deuteronomy's addition of this requirement for the regular public reading of the covenant law at the feast of Tabernacles in the seventh year of release (31:9-13), a requirement that became relevant and applicable with the arrival of the Israelites at the threshold of their inheritance in Canaan. The document which was to be brought forth and read was not one of the stone tables but the "book of the law" which Moses wrote and had placed by the side of the ark (31:9, 26). However, even if "this book of the law" is identified with Deuteronomy alone, reading it would have included a re-proclamation of the contents of the tables.


\(^{19}\) Taking Pentateucal history at its face value, we discover that the Book of Deuteronomy exhibits precisely the legal form which contemporary second millennium B.C. evidence indicates a suzerain would employ in his rule of a vassal nation like Israel at such an historical juncture. See further Chapter 2.
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The relevance of the foregoing for higher critical conclusions concerning the Decalogue may be noted in passing. Along with a decreasing reluctance in negative critical studies to accept the Mosaic origin of the Decalogue, the judgment continues that the present form of the Sinaitic Decalogue is an expansion of the original, which is then reduced to an abridged version of the ten words, without preamble, historical prologue, or curses and blessings, and often without even an abridged form of the second and fourth words. Similarly, even where there is no bias against the Bible's representations concerning its own origins, the supposition has gained currency that it was an abbreviated version of the Decalogue that was engraved on the stone tables. Such estimates of the contents of the Mosaic tables are clearly unsatisfactory, since the supposed abbreviated forms lack those very features which distinguish the tables as that which comparative study indicates was called for by the historical occasion, and biblical exegesis indicates the tables to be, not a brief ethical catechism, but copies of the Sinaitic covenant.

The purpose of Israel's copy of the covenant was that of a documentary witness (Deut. 31:26). It was witness to and against Israel, reminding of obligations sworn to and rebuking for obligations violated, declaring the hope of covenant beatitude and pronouncing the doom of the covenant curses. The public proclamation of it was designed to teach the fear of the Lord to all Israel, especially to the children (Deut. 31:13; cf. Ps. 78:5ff.).

The secular treaties and the biblical covenant share a perspective of family solidarity reflected in numerous references to the sons and grandsons of the vassal. In the political treaties, sworn commitment is in the terms: "we, our sons, and our grandsons"; and agreeably both curses and blessings are pronounced unto children's children. "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (Ex. 20:5b) is the biblical counterpart, defining the bounds of corporate responsibility in guilt under

21. Various types of covenant witnesses other than the divine witness are mentioned. Cf. the Song of Moses, which he had Israel memorize (Deut. 31:19, 25; 32:1ff.); the stones with the law written upon them erected on Ebal (Deut. 27:26f.; Josh. 8:30-35); and the stone witness of covenant renewal at Shechem (Josh. 24:29, 27).
this covenant administration by the utmost limits of contemporaneity (here described by means of numerical climax, a popular device of Hebrew and Canaanite literature).

Both copies of the covenant were laid before Yahweh as God of the oath. But what was the purpose of Yahweh's own copy in his capacity as covenant Suzerain? In the case of the international treaties, the suzerain would naturally want to possess, preserve, and protect a sealed legal witness to the treaty. It would remind him of the vassal's adź for the purpose of enforcement and punishment; for he would be the actual avenger of the oath, the instrument of the oath deities according to the religious theory which was the legal fiction lending sacred sanction to the treaty. It would also remind him of his suzerain's role as protector of the vassal and of the various specific promises of assistance often contained in the treaties. He had not, however, like the vassal, taken a covenant oath and human lords being what they are he would have considerably less interest in the benefits he might bestow than in the amount of annual tribute he was entitled to exact from the vassal.

Such mutatis mutandis was the purpose of Yahweh's own stone table of covenant witness. However, even from the formal point of view there is here a remarkable shift in emphasis arising from the fact that God's suzerainty covenant with Israel was an administration of salvation. The form of the blessing suggests the unique emphasis: "showing mercy," and that not merely to the third and fourth generation of them that love him but, contrary to the balance observed in this respect in the curse and blessing formulae of the international treaties, "to a thousand generations" (Deut. 7:9). This much more abounding of grace is evidenced even in connection with the function of the stone tables as witnesses against Israel; for since the divine throne under which the tables were located was the place of atonement, the witness of the tables against Israel never ascended to Yahweh apart from the witness of the blood advocating mercy.

The divine Suzerain's condescension in his redemptive covenant at the time of its Abrahamic administration extended to the humiliation of swearing himself to covenant fidelity as Lord of the covenant and Fulfiller of the promises (Gen. 15). Mendenhall mistakenly regards the Abrahamic Covenant as com-

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pletely different in kind from the Sinaitic, partly because of
God's oath and partly because of an alleged absence of obli-
gations imposed on Abraham. Actually, the total allegiance to
his Lord demanded of Abraham (see Gen. 12:1; 17:1) was
precisely that fealty which the treaty stipulations were designed
to secure.

Moreover, it is demonstrable that an oath on the part of
the suzerain was not incompatible with the genius of the
relationship governed by a suzerainty treaty. There are, for
example, a treaty and a related deed from Alalakh, both
concerned with one Abban, the vizier of Hattusa, and his bestow-
ment of certain cities upon his political "servant" Irurimi.
The treaty states that Abban confirmed the gift in perpetuity
by a self-maledictory oath accompanied by the symbolism of
slaughtering a sheep. It also stipulates that the territorial gift
is forfeit if Irurimi is disloyal to Abban. The text deeding
Alalakh (part of Abban's gift) pronounces curses upon any
who would alter Abban's purpose by hostilities against Irurimi.
All this corresponds perfectly to God's dealings with Abraham.
The Lord covenanted territory to his servant Abraham as an
everlasting possession (Gen. 12:1, 2; 13:14-17; 15:18) and did
so by a self-maledictory oath symbolized by the slaying of
animals (Gen. 15:9ff.). Moreover, it is clear that by rebellion
against Yahweh's word Abraham would forfeit the promise
(Gen. 22:16, 17a; cf. Deut. 28, especially vv. 63ff.); and finally,
the Egyptians and Canaanites who would oppose this territorial
grant were cursed (Gen. 12:3; 15:14, 16, 19-21).

God's oath is, therefore, in keeping with the suzerain-vassal
relationship. The generic nature of God's covenants with his
people remains first and last a declaration of divine lordship,
a lordship which may be manifested in the execution of promises
or threats. These covenants are sovereign administrations not
of blessing exclusively but of curse and blessing according to
the vassal's deserts. Since, however, the specifically soteri-

23. Published by D. J. Wiseman in the Journal of Cuneiform Studies
XII (Dec. 1958) 4, pp. 124-129 and in The Alalakh Tablets (London,
1958), pp. 26, 26, plate 1, respectively.
would obviously be unsound methodology to give this special feature which belongs to the specifically redemptive covenant administrations a constitutive place when defining the covenant generically. Nevertheless, divine guarantees of blessing such as God's oath to Abraham, guarantees which, without violating human responsibility, assure to the elect vassals that in Christ they will receive that covenant righteousness which is the stipulated way to covenant beatitude, such guarantees are not in the least incompatible with the nature of suzerainty covenants as here defined in terms of divine lordship, enforced in a revelation of law consisting of stipulations and sanctions, both promissory and penal.

Considered in relation to the divine oath and promise, Yahweh's duplicate table of the covenant served a purpose analogous to that of the rainbow in his covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:17-19). Beholding this table, he remembered his oath to his servants and faithfully brought to pass the promised blessing. And in that day when the four and twenty heavenly elders worship him saying, "Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great," then appropriately, the temple of God in heaven being opened, there is seen in his temple the ark of his covenant, the depository of God's table of remembrance (Rev. 11:17-19).

There remains the question of the relevance of our interpretation of the duplicate tables of the covenant for the understanding of their law content. The increased emphasis on the covenantal context of the law underscores the essential continuity in the function of law in the Old and New Testaments. The Decalogue is not offered fallen man as a genuine soteric option but is presented as a guide to citizenship within the covenant by the Saviour-Lord, who of his mercy delivers out of the house of bondage into communion in the life of the covenant -- a communion which eventuates in perfect conformity of life to the law of the covenant. To stress the covenantal "I-thou" nature of this law is also to reaffirm the personal-religious character of biblical ethics at the same time that it recognizes that covenantal religion and its ethics are susceptible of communication in the form of structured truth. Yahweh describes the beneficiaries of his mercy as "them that love me and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:6; cf. John 14:15).
Recognition of the completeness of each of the tables provides a corrective to the traditional view’s obscuration of the covenantal-religious nature of the laws in “the second table.” A hegemony of religion over ethics has, indeed, always been predicated on the basis of the priority in order and verbal quantity of the laws of “the first table,” analyzed as duty or love to God, over the laws of “the second table,” analyzed as duty or love to man. Nevertheless, this very division of the ten words into “two tables” with the category “love of God” used as a means of separating one “table” from the other is liable to the misunderstanding that the fulfillment of the demands of “the second table” is to some degree, if not wholly, independent of the principle of love for God.

Our Lord’s familiar teaching concerning a “first and great commandment” and a “second like unto it” (Matt. 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-31) has figured prominently in the speculation about the contents of “the two tables.” It is, however, gratuitous to suppose that Jesus was epitomizing in turn a “first table” and “second table” as traditionally conceived. Furthermore, it must be seriously questioned whether Jesus’ commandment to love God’s image-bearer, ourselves and our neighbors alike, can properly be restricted after the dominant fashion to the fifth through the tenth laws. The nearest parallel in the Decalogue to the specific language of Jesus is found in the fourth law as formulated in Deuteronomy (5:14): The sabbath is to be kept “that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.” And does man not best serve the eternal interests of himself and his neighbor when he promotes obedience to the first three commandments? Is that not the ethical justification of the great commandment?

But beyond all doubt Jesus’ “great commandment” must be the heart motive of man in the whole compass of his life. Restricting the principle of love of God to the sphere of worship would prejudice the comprehensiveness of God’s absolute lordship which is the foundation of the covenant order.

24. In the Westminster Confession of Faith, for example, it is the only proof text cited for distinguishing between the “tables” in terms of duty towards God and duty to man (chap. XIX, sec. II).

25. There is no explicit reference to the two stone tables in the context, which is broadly concerned with the generality of scriptural legislation. Jesus relates his two commandments to the totality of Old Testament revelation (Matt. 22:40).
That the love of God with heart, soul, mind, and strength is as relevant to the tenth commandment as it is to the first is evident from the fact that to violate the tenth is to worship Mammon, and we cannot love and serve God and Mammon. Or consider the tenth word from the viewpoint of the principle of stewardship, the corollary of the principle of God's covenant lordship. Property in the Israelite theocracy was held only in fief under the Lord who declared: "For the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev. 25:23b). Therefore to cover the inheritance of one's neighbor was to covet what was God's and so betray want of love for him. The application of this is universal because not just Canaan but "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1).

The comprehensiveness of Jesus' "first and great commandment" is evident from the preamble and historical prologue of the covenant document. Being introductory to the whole body of stipulations which follow, they are manifestly intended to inculte the proper motivation for obedience not to three or four or five of the stipulations but to them all; and the motivation they inspire is that of love to the divine Redeemer. Why are we to love our neighbors? Because we love the God who loves them and, according to the principle articulated in the sabbath commandment (Ex. 20:11), the imperative to love God is also a demand to be like him.

The two commandments of Jesus do not distinguish two separable areas of human life but two complementary aspects of human responsibility. Our Lord's perspective is one with that of the duplicate tables of the covenant which comprehend the whole duty of man within the unity of his consecration to his covenant Lord.