CLAUSES OF PROTECTION IN HITTITE VASSAL-TREATIES AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

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In a paper to be published in ZAW we have promised to investigate into parallels between the obliteration of a common enemy in Hittite vassal-treaties and the same idea in the Old Testament. In the past two years enormous progress is made in the understanding of the relation between Hittite vassal-treaties and the Old Testament covenantal forms 1). This progress is further incited by the publication and study of new material discovered at Ugarit 2). The impact of the royal chancellery language 3) in the latter part of the second millennium BC. on the greater part of the ancient Near East is now obvious. Furthermore, the influence of this language held its own for many centuries to come. The direct or indirect influence of this language on the Old Testament covenantal forms was studied from various angles. But there is still much to be done.

In his study on Old Testament covenantal forms in comparison with the Hittite treaties, MENDENHALL expresses the opinion that this comparison is only applicable to the Decalogue and Joshua xxiv 4). Klaus BALTZER distinguishes between primary Old Testament covenantal forms, like Josh. xxiv, Ex. xix-xxiv and Dt. i-iv, xxviii-xxx; and the renewal of the covenant, like Ex. xxxiv, Neh. ix-x etc. 5) Walter BEYERLIN, on the other hand, is more inclined to compare only the Decalogue with the Hittite treaties 6). In the above mentioned

3) Cf. BALTZER, p. 28.
4) GEORGE MENDENHALL, Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East, p. 36.
5) BALTZER, pp. 29ff and 48ff.
6) BEYERLIN, pp. 59ff. For a convenient summary of the Decalogue and modern scholarship cf. J. J. STAMM, Der Dekalog im Lichte der neueren Forschung, 1958,
paper we have pointed out that the final clauses of malediction and benediction in ancient Near Eastern vassal-treaties have also parallels to other legal material than specifically covenantal parts. We fully agree with W. F. Albright that the Covenant was "much more pervasive in its effect on the religious and political life of Israel" 1). It is also true that the influence of the Hittite treaties is pervasive in more legal material of the Old Testament outside specific covenantal forms than hereto acknowledged. Some of this legal material occurs as clauses of protection especially in Exodus.

In the Hittite treaties protection is promised by the great king, the sun, to his vassal against enemies. At the same time the great king claimed from his vassal immediate aid when his country should be attacked by enemies. Some of these clauses can be classified under the heading of future relations between the partners 2). Others are mere military obligations of a defensive kind 3). We have an analogous situation in the Old Testament where Yahweh promises protection against foreign foes. On the other hand, obedience is claimed from the nation Israel and the utter obliteration of any vestige of idolatry. The service of any other god is forbidden. The question is: Is there any relation between these parallel thoughts? The use of Hittite material for illumination of Old Testament problems is not far-fetched as Mendenhall has pointed out 4). The real contactpoint must have been through Syria at times when the Hittites were in command of the greater part of Syria 5). The influence of Mesopotamian thought on the Hittites is also very important. This influence was exercised either through Mittani (Horite) or through Syria 6). It is now an established fact that the legal material of ancient Israel sprang from a similar background than that of Mesopotamia. Both these reasons give an explanation for parallel material between these civilizations and also the possibility of comparison. In light of this we may proceed to investigate into common clauses of protection in Hittite vassal-treaties and the Old Testament.

1) W. F. Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity, 1957, p. 2.
3) Cf. the classification of Nougayrol, PRU IV, p. 84 under B.
5) Cf. e.g. the treaties between Niqmea of Ugarit and Muršiliš II, PRU, IV, pp. 84ff.