

## The Davidic Covenant

The covenant of Sinai revealed the particular emphasis of calling forth from the people a commitment to the Lord. This commitment to God was understood as a commitment to the plan of God expressed in the inner organization of the people, both in cultic life and in social laws. A unity had been formed based on a religious alliance. This was a new phenomenon in the history of religious ideas. We saw how the biblical writers envisaged the new entity as being in continuity with the Abrahamic promises. Sinai fulfilled the essential features of the Abrahamic covenant, yet went beyond the promise of life to co-involving the people which was an essential component of the gift of life and blessing. This of course would have serious repercussions politically for Israel. Covenant and politics henceforth would be inextricably interwoven. At Sinai the Israelites became a people, a political body, that needed space and organization. Israel as a political body had to root itself in a land, in space and in time. What was unique in their continuous acclimatization, or inculturation, is that they looked to their covenant with the LORD as the basis for re-organization. This essential thrust of turning to a covenant in Israel's history is what we uncover in following the story of Israel's creativity, tension and faithfulness, all of which belong to the episodes and interpretations of the Davidic covenant.

A lively debate surrounds the establishment of the monarchy and the covenant with David. Continuity and discontinuity are the extreme poles which are claimed to characterize the relationship between the Davidic and Mosaic covenants. There definitely is a strand in the writings, which would highlight the religious tension that the monarchy created. This strand ultimately interpreted the experiment of the monarchy as an aberration from the Sinai covenant. On the other hand, the tradition as we have it sought to reconcile the two covenants. David is seen as a second Moses. David is interpreted as the one who realizes the promise of Sinai in the new cultural setting of Canaan. The Davidic covenant reveals the necessity of inculturation on a political level, and it also reveals the bipolarity of gift and task, promise and responsibility which forever works itself out in concrete situations. To appreciate the creativity of the Davidic Covenant it is necessary to set it against the backdrop of the political challenge that faced the Israelites in the 11th century. Three covenantal texts can serve as a basis for entering this complex stage of events in Israel's history, 1 Sam 8:1–10:1; 1 Sam 11:4–12:25; 2 Sam 6–7. From the perspective of a positive interpretation, the Monarchy is understood as an integration of Yahwist faith and civilization.

The challenge that emerged for the Israelites was in the first place political. But precisely because theirs was a religious unity, the political challenge became at the same time and necessarily so, a religious challenge. The Israelites had been at odds with several other cities and tribes since the time of their penetration into Canaan. In 1 Sam 11, we see recorded the important battle of Mitzpah between Nabash the Ammonite and the Israelite tribes. The Philistines had been gaining the upper hand in the time of Samuel. They did not form a united kingdom, but they acted as such a united whole and with such concerted effort that the loose organization of the

tribes was not able to match them. With their chariots the Philistines controlled the plains, and with their skills in metallurgy they even held the upper hand in combat. Their one weakness was numbers.

A conflict emerged. And this conflict translated itself into a religious query. God truly was Lord of the Exodus and Lord of Sinai. The writings exemplify an unambiguous reliance on this memory of a deliverance from Egypt through the desert. But, was this God of the desert simply the God of a clan, who now should take a place among the council of gods as a lesser god of a relatively unimportant people entering the stage of sedentary civilization? Was this God of the desert also Lord in these new circumstances? Was God also Lord of sedentary life? Was the God of the ancestors, who formed the Israelites into a people in the desert, the Lord of the crops and of the rain in the skies? Was God the Lord of nature, master of creation and of the entire cosmos? The answers to these questions would take centuries to clarify. We should not underestimate the challenge that the new dawn of sedentary life posed to the loose organization of tribes with faith in a desert God. It would have been possible that those who subscribed only to the God of the desert would have vanished under the wave of the reorganization of sedentary and civilized life. The emergence of sedentary civilization, with its organization and structure, needed to be integrated into the faith of the Lord of the Exodus and of the desert. There is a strand discernible in the historical books, perhaps exemplified acutely in the Gideon narrative that seemed to assert that any reorganization would be tantamount to rebellion against God. In the name of conservatism, this strand in the tradition came close to limiting the power and role of God in creation and in history. From the other point of view, this brand of conservatism was actually unfaithful to the Spirit of God which blows where it will, in Egypt, in the desert, in the loose federation, but also in civilization, in reorganization, in stability, in the rhythm of nature.

*Then the men of Israel said, "Rule over us, you and your son and your grandson also; for you have delivered us out of the hand of Midian." Gideon said to them, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you" (Judges 8:22-23).*

Reorganization along the lines of the Canaanites or of the eastern kingdoms was considered to be trusting in human ways rather than God's ways. Reorganization was perceived at least by one particular segment of the tradition as "a breaking of the covenant".

However, there is also another strand that eventually becomes the dominant one. It proves to be theologically more productive. Precisely because the LORD has proved to be ruler of the cosmos by raising Israel with David from under the disaster of Philistine power, the original mosaic covenant has been proved to be valid. The covenant with David then in this strand is understood as an application of the Lord's will to save Israel in the new circumstances of Canaan. The covenant with David is ultimately seen as the revelation that the God of the desert is also the God of the cosmos and of all creation. Perhaps it is helpful to understand the rise of the Davidic covenant as Israel's coming to consciousness of God's reign over all creation. In the Davidic covenant Israel comes to recognize that the God who led the Hebrews out from Egypt and who

brought them through the desert to the Land of Canaan, who helped integrate ancestors of the land into the covenant people, is moreover the God of the cosmos, of creation, of history and of the rhythms of life and death, precisely because God is recognized as creator. In the Sinai covenant God is recognized as a Saviour, in the Davidic covenant God is recognized as the Creator. The Davidic covenant is the continuity of God's faithful covenant love *in the new circumstances* of civilization.

Historically and theologically, this transition from a loose federation to an organized kingdom is presented as having taken place in two stages: in the figure of Saul who symbolizes human initiative or at the least human pride and arrogance that ended in failure and ruin, and in the figure of David who symbolizes God's initiative and which issues in success and glory.

### The Rise and Fall of Saul

The very structure of the narrative, which introduces the formal establishment of the kingdom, alternates between a negative stance toward the monarchy and a positive one.

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|------|----|----------------|---|--|
| neg. | A  | 1 Sam 8:1-22   | – | Asking for a king is interpreted by God as apostasy<br><i>"It is not you they have rejected but me from ruling over them."</i>   |
| pos. | B  | 1 Sam 9–10:16  | – | The chivalrous story of Saul being anointed king; he goes out to look for his father's donkeys and he comes back with a kingdom. |
| neg. | C  | 1 Sam 10:17-27 | – | Samuel interprets the asking for a king as a rejection of God. Saul "hides among the baggage".                                   |
| pos. | B' | 1 Sam 11:1-15  | – | The Spirit of God comes upon Saul and he defeats Nahash the Ammonite.  |
| neg. | A' | 1 Sam 12:1-25  | – | Samuel warns the people of disaster if they do not serve the LORD with all their heart.  |

### The establishment of a king 1 Sam 8–12

Already in the figure of Saul the two positions with respect to the monarchy are present, one unfavourable and the other favourable. But within the context of the Samuel narratives, the brief reign of Saul is an example of human folly and disobedience.

The call for a King in 1 Sam 8 presents the most negative interpretation of the desire for a monarchy. The initiative for reorganization is in the people, and their motive for reorganization is

to be strong like the other nations. They wish to be like other nations; they wish to have a king to wage their battles; they are interpreted as refusing to have the Lord as their king. From the point of view of political strategy, the tribes had no choice but to reorganize into a more centralized unity or face doom at the hands of other more organized powers. The problem was how to effect such a transformation and remain faithful to the Lord of the Exodus and the Lord of Sinai.

The renewal of the kingdom in 1 Sam 11–12 shows at least a possibility of integrating the establishment of the kingdom into the covenant of Sinai. *"And now behold the king whom you have chosen, for whom you have asked; behold, the LORD has set a king over you. If you will fear the LORD and serve him and harken to his voice and not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, and if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well; but if you will not harken to the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king."* (1 Sam 12:12-15). But both the king and the people will not follow the ways of the Lord in this first attempt at reorganizing the political life of Israel. The people do not follow the ways of the Lord in the way they demanded a king and in their taking of the spoil that is devoted to destruction. Saul himself was disobedient on two counts that revealed his unwillingness to base the reorganization of the kingdom according to the Lord's will. Saul was disobedient at Gilgal (1 Sam 13:7-15), which earned him Samuel's wrath who declared that his kingdom would not continue. The Lord would seek out someone after his own heart. Jonathan's unwitting disobedience of Saul's order ended in success (1 Sam 14:43-46). This only highlights how Saul stood in disfavour before the people as well as before the Lord. Finally Saul was disobedient in not have executed Agag (1 Sam 15), and for letting the people share in the spoil which was to be given to God. For this Saul is formally rejected as being the king.

The initial attempt at establishing the Kingdom does have God's final approval, in the form of an anointing at the hands of Samuel (1 Sam 10) and in the prophetic/charismatic form of the spirit of God resting on Saul (*As Saul turned away to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart*, 1 Sam 10:9; *And the Spirit of God came upon Saul in power when he heard these words...*, 1 Sam 11:6). However, the ensuing episodes essentially relate Saul's falling out of rootedness with God and the people. The first episode of disobedience shows Saul falling out of rootedness with his own prophet Samuel (1 Sam 13); the second episode of anxiety shows his falling out of rootedness with his own people who save Jonathan from the rash oath of Saul (1 Sam 14:24-46); and finally the third episode of disobedience reveals the unbridgeable chasm between Saul and God (1 Sam 15).

**1) 1 Sam 13** – The Philistines were encamped at Michmash, and the Israelites were distressed and nervous. We have no explanation for Saul's own nervousness. Up till now he has exercised leadership in a courageous manner. Here we see Saul unable to keep the soldiers from fear and he himself is nervous at the delay of Samuel who was to arrive for the sacrifice. In order to maintain proper religious appearances, Saul offers the sacrifice, thus usurping the function and role of Samuel. This event inaugurates Samuel's judgment that the reign of Saul would not last and that God will have to seek someone "after his own heart".

**2) 1 Sam 14-46** – The second scene presents us with a courageous act of Jonathan, Saul's son and heir to the throne, which functions as an explicit contrast to the emerging weak character of Saul. Single-handedly, Jonathan took the risk of attacking the Philistine garrison with only his armour-bearer and caused a great victory of the Israelites over the Philistines. In contrast to his act of courage, Saul again appears weak and restless, unsure of how to proceed. He even forces an unreasonable fast on the soldiers in order to enlist the blessing of God. Jonathan had not heard of the fast and ate some honey. Because of this Saul actually orders Jonathan's execution, that of his own son, "*Saul said, 'God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan'.*" Ironically, it is the people who save Jonathan using very strong terms against Saul. "*Then the people said to Saul, 'Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great victory in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground; for he has worked with God today'.*" It is Jonathan who is presented as being rooted in God and in the people.

**3) 1 Sam 15** – The third episode shows the depth of the breach that has occurred between Saul and the God of Israel. A great victory has been won over the Amalekites and their King Agag. All the spoil was meant for destruction, nothing was to remain. But the people wanted things from the spoil, so they only devoted to destruction what was 'despised and worthless' (1 Sam 15:9). Moreover, Saul refused to have Agag executed. With this act of disobedience, Samuel reveals God's ultimate break with Saul. No longer is Saul the legitimate King of Israel (1 Sam 15:26):

*"And Samuel said to Saul, 'I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel'."*

We witness Saul pathetically trying to explain his actions by placing the blame on the people, who wanted to take from the best of the spoil. This is reminiscent of Aaron who also gave in to the desires of the people to have an idol to remind them of God's presence in their weakness. Saul is presented as being concerned about appearances, not about the heart of the matter. For instance he erected at Carmel a monument for himself (1 Sam 15:12). In the breach with God, Saul asks of Samuel to appear with him to worship God, the idea being that the people consider that all is well between him and Samuel and God. There is even a symbolic action that captures Saul's pathetic attempt to maintain appearances. He catches hold of Samuel's garment to deter him from leaving without worshipping with Saul. The garment tears and Samuel declares that just so the kingdom of Israel has been torn from Saul. The stress on Saul's desire to maintain appearances explains the lack of forgiveness in the episode. Saul confesses his sin, but is not forgiven. The reason for this lack of forgiveness is that Saul confesses only on the surface. In fact he confesses only to gain the continued support of Samuel.

A theme that runs through all three episodes concentrates on Saul's attempt to appear on the surface to be abiding by the ways of God. In the first, he wants to enlist God's favour for the impending battle by offering a sacrifice (thus usurping the prerogative of Samuel); in the second he wishes to force God's beneficent power through the order of a fast which then compels Saul to

order the execution of his own son Jonathan, so that the rash oath may be upheld; in the third he erects a monument to himself, he confesses in order to gain time and forestall the judgment of Samuel, and he pathetically attempts to force Samuel to worship with him so that the people may think that his relationship with Samuel and God is in tact.

Underlying this critique of the character of Saul is the emphasis of the value of rooting the new monarchy in the conditions of the covenant, namely to follow the laws of God. And this rootedness to the law of God is not to be understood superficially as a compliance of rules and regulations, but rather as flowing from one's heart. The rise of David focuses precisely on this image that God has chosen someone according to his heart and not according to his appearances.

The final tradition envisages the first attempt to reorganize the kingdom as a failure because Saul and the people did not base the kingdom on the will of God that would be in continuity with the covenant. The value that the deuteronomists are highlighting in these accounts is the importance of basing one's secular life and organization on the religious commandments of the covenants. Though Saul had begun with an endorsement by God, namely he had been anointed by Samuel and the spirit came down upon him like upon the prophets, he did not show a particular desire to be faithful to the ways of the LORD. In the books of Samuel the tragedy of Saul is turned into a theological statement. The reorganization of Israel demands loyalty and faithfulness to the ways of God. Saul is presented as one who did not follow the ways of the Lord<sup>1</sup>.

The stories of the rise of David, which describe his secret anointing, his great and courageous feat of defeating Goliath<sup>2</sup> in the name of the Lord, his constant respect for the Lord's

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<sup>1</sup> Often the objection is raised that we have an inconsistency or unevenness in the Samuel/Kings narratives. Saul sins and loses the kingdom; David sins but does not lose the kingdom. The nature of their establishment as kings constitutes the main difference. Saul in the final tradition became a king because of the people's choice. David became king because the Lord had sought out someone after his own heart. Saul was punished according to his sin of disobedience in usurping prophetic powers; David was punished in the loss of his son and in enmity among his descendants. Even within these stories of the establishment of the kingdom the refrain is constantly heard - follow the Lord with your whole heart and your whole mind.

<sup>2</sup> It is possible that this story of the extraordinary act of heroism on the part of the young David was ascribed to him from other heroic accounts. In 2 Samuel 21:19, from David's own chroniclers, we have the annotation that it was Elhanan who killed Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. The attribution of this feat to David more than likely caused the Chronicler to make a distinction between two "giants", one that David killed and one that Elhanan killed. In 1 Chronicles 20:17, in the parallel passage that describes the exploits of David's soldiers, the one who Elhanan killed is described as the brother of Goliath whose name was Lahmi. In all three cases, we have the same descriptive device which identifies the giant as having a spear whose shaft was the size of a weaver's beam (1 Sam 17:7; 2 Sam 21:19; 1 Chron 20:5).

anointed one, David is shown as the one who places trust in God. For this reason the Lord has blessed David in all that he did. The Lord would bring about the salvation of Israel from this new threat of the Philistines through the hand of David who is utterly rooted in the Lord even from his childhood.

There are two theological points that run through the accounts of David's rise to power. The first consists of the qualities of character that are necessary to be leader of Israel. The leader is to be one who follows the Lord with his whole heart, mind and soul. It is this line of thought which has the Lord blessing all of David's enterprises. The Lord has found in David someone after his own heart. A second theological point consists of the assertion that any reorganization of the loose tribal league into a powerful kingdom must be based on the values of the covenant people. The LORD must remain the symbol of the new kingdom. The basis of this reorganization must be the will of the Lord. The king must make it clear that he rules only in the name of the Lord.

With regard to both of these theological points, Saul symbolized faithlessness and disobedience. David on the other hand showed a faithful character trusting in God as well as a loyal love for the Lord in the reorganization of the kingdom.

The tension between Saul and David was rooted in sheer political intrigues, but on the literary level the tensions were translated into theological statements. Saul and Abner were from the northern tribes and David was from the south. David showed astuteness and perhaps even craftiness in bringing about reconciliation between the two sets of tribes. In his lament over the death of Saul and Jonathan and also in his reaction to the murders of Abner and Ishbosheth, David maintains distance and regret. All of David's enemies are presented as having been eliminated without his direct involvement. Historically, this stretches the imagination.

The narrative of David's rise to power shows an interweaving of David's politics, personal life, and theological pursuits. All three are so interwoven in the narrative that it does an injustice to treat the character of David exclusively from one point of view. At times what is not said in the text also may indicate David's rise to power over the monarchy as well. One such point is the relative silence of the narrative regarding David's own family. Though the narrative of David began with Samuel's search among Jesse's sons in Bethlehem, David expresses very little interest in his own family.<sup>3</sup> Rather, David's life becomes more and more bound to the

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<sup>3</sup> The only references to Jesse's family occur in David's anointing and service to Saul, 1 Sam 16; in the episode of David's brothers during their military service of Saul, 1 Sam 17:17-30, in the scene of his brothers and parents joining David during his flight to the stronghold of Adullam (probably because they were now in jeopardy at the hands of Saul's army) and the parents being put into the care of the King of Moab, 1 Sam 22:1-5. After this there is total silence on the initial family of David. We are not informed of the death of David's parents. The next time that Moab appears we see David brutally subjugating the Moabites (2 Sam 8:1-3). This has led to the rabbinic conjecture that in fact David was to a certain extent in enmity with his own family, who in fact are perceived in the text as holding David back. Is it possible that in his rejection of his own family in favour of Saul's that David is actually responsible for the death

family of the reigning King Saul. David becomes intimately bound to the three personages of Saul's house: Saul, Jonathan, Michal. Instead of going to his own family for help to forge a new Kingdom, David is described as forging relationships with key people in Saul's family and among the priests. This in itself already inaugurates a tremendous shift from the Tribal ways which relied heavily on family and tribal loyalties. David is breaking such family ties in order to forge loyalties that are based on a unity of the Tribes organized into a centralized stable Kingdom.

Notice how David is said to have become the personal armour-bearer of Saul and was actually accepted into his house. *"And David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armour-bearer"* (1 Sam 16:21). *"Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house"* (1 Sam 18:2). Jonathan recognizes in David a similar valiant character and is bound to him through a formal covenant. *"When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul"* (1 Sam 18:1). Finally David marries Michal, Saul's daughter and becomes Saul's son-in-law (1 Sam 18:27). Michal loved David (1 Sam 18:20,28). In all three cases, we can see that David comes into a formal relationship with the key personages of Saul's family. David has left his own family and become intimately bound to the family of Saul. Even though politically this is very astute on the part of David, the motivation in each relationship is said to be on the side of Saul's family. It is Saul who loved David; it is Jonathan whose soul was knit to the soul of David, it is Michal who loved David.

Though David is presented as having a formal relationship with all three key personages, it should be remembered that two of these relationships, namely with Saul and Michal, become destructive and sterile. Saul pursues David as a threat with a vehemence and passion that borders on the absurd. Michal originally is said to have loved David and even saves him from Saul's killing project (1 Sam 19:11-17). But she too rejects and despises David and their relationship literally remains sterile; they have no son or daughter. It is David's relationship to Jonathan that is actually described in the most touching of human terms. David's effective rise to monarch is reflected primarily through the change in his relationship to Jonathan. In this series of episodes that narrate the relationship between Jonathan and David we witness the change from David being the inferior member of the covenant who needs a protector in the personage of the King's son, to the superior member who receives the task of succeeding Saul as King.

**1 Sam 18:1-5** In this episode which formally announces a covenant between Jonathan and David, Jonathan is clearly the superior member in the agreement. The initiative is all on the

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of his parents? As such, the narrative remains curiously silent on David's relationship to his own family, and very concerned of David's relationship to each member of Saul's.



side of Jonathan. The gifts that Jonathan gives of himself, his robe, armour, sword, bow and belt, are all symbols of the military allegiance that is being established between these two valiant military characters. We have the mixing of military symbols into a relationship of human love and affection. Repeatedly throughout these episodes Jonathan is said to love David.

**1 Sam 19:1-7** The covenant relationship between Jonathan and David indicates Jonathan's role as protector. In this encounter between Jonathan and David we see Saul's son who effectively is able to convince Saul of David's forthrightness. He actually restores David to Saul's side for a brief time.

**1 Sam 20:1-42** In this rather lengthy, detailed narrative, Jonathan's expression of respect, concern and love for David reaches its zenith. David tries to convince Jonathan that Saul is out to kill him and enlists his help to find out the matter once and for all. Although we still see Jonathan as David's protector, a new element emerges in the narrative. It is now Jonathan who asks a favour from David, namely to be faithful to Jonathan's own family and to protect them when he is gone. This is a reference to Jonathan's eventual demise and death. David agrees in a formal covenant. The scene ends with the clear revelation of Saul's disfavour toward both David and Jonathan. Jonathan and David kiss and weep over the revelation. The scene is reminiscent of the episode where Joseph reveals himself to his brothers (Gen 45:14-15). Here Joseph "falls" onto Benjamin's neck and weeps, and he "kisses" all of his brothers and "weeps" on them. All three verbs are used in our narrative, David "falls" with his face to the ground, they "kissed" each other and "wept" with each other. There is no relationship between two characters in Scripture that is described in such spontaneous affectionate terms as that between David and Jonathan.<sup>4</sup>

**1 Sam 23:15-18** This final encounter between David and Jonathan reveals David's emerging superiority. Jonathan declares David to be King and accepts his own position to be David's second. And this is also formally recognized as a covenant.

Even after the fall of the house of Saul, we see David's powerful tie to Jonathan extending to the latter's only living son, Mephibosheth, who was a cripple (and therefore could not be a serious threat to David's throne). After his consolidation of power, David reestablishes the lands of Saul to Mephibosheth and invites him to his own house to eat at his own table (2 Sam 9, cf. 2 Sam 16:1-4, 19:24-30). In this way, David's promise to Jonathan in the third episode

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<sup>4</sup> The Song of Songs which celebrates human love in female and male imagery of course is the most extensive description of human lovers in Scripture, but of course they have no names. The closest parallel to the description of the affectionate relationship between Jonathan and David is that of Joseph and his brothers at the end of the Book of Genesis.

of their relationship is fulfilled in David's treatment of Mephibosheth.

What seems to have had a powerful effect in bringing about the union of the two sets of tribes was the conquest of Jerusalem and its choice as the centre for the kingdom.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, David brought the ark to Jerusalem thereby rooting the establishment of the kingdom on the foundation of the memories of the exodus and of the covenant. Saul is nowhere depicted as attempting to root the kingdom in the symbols of the tribal life. By bringing the ark to Jerusalem, 2 Sam 6, David had done what Saul failed to do. David was formally basing the reorganization of the tribes into a kingdom that was based on the will of the LORD. The presence of the Lord in the symbol of the ark assured a powerful link to the pre-monarchic times. With David, the theological crisis that the Philistines posed to the loose federation could find a solution. God was not only Lord of the Patriarchs, Lord of the Exodus, the Lord of Sinai, but God is the Lord of history and of the cosmos. In the Davidic kingdom, God was acclaimed as the sovereign precisely in the setting in which Israelites found themselves. In other words Israel had to reorganize itself in order to be faithful to the God of the exodus and to be obedient to the will of the Lord. But the reorganization had to be based on the will and presence of God in order to be faithful to the covenant.

Perhaps it was this great genius for which David was so positively remembered, despite his grasping for power, despite his ruthless character in having Uriah killed, despite the census, despite the reckless behaviour he seems to have allowed in his own family which caused so much infighting. He is the one who brought Yahwism successfully into the cultures of Canaan, into the complex organization of a kingdom. There would be misunderstandings and tensions, there would even be attempts to idealize the wilderness experience and the trust of God in the loose federation. But the achievement of the kingdom of the Lord under David would continue to shine forth with theological possibilities.

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<sup>5</sup> The episode describing the taking of the Jebusite city is filled with controversy. It was an impregnable city. Apparently the Jebusites were so confident it could not be taken that they taunted David saying that even the blind and the lame would hold him off. David apparently commands that his soldiers attack up the watershaft and so take the city which otherwise could not be taken. It is interesting that if this impregnable city had really been taken by such an astute military move, that it would not have received more legends to bolster the military genius of David. This has led to the other possibility, which of course does reveal David's astute political mastery, namely that he was victorious over the Jebusite city by convincing them to open their gates to him and become the political centre of Israel and of having their own priesthood integrated into that of Israel. The two facts that give rise to this theory are: 1) David chooses the Jebusite city ("the town of peace" = Jeru shalaim) as the capital in order to bring about peace between the northern and southern tribes (Jerusalem was located on the border between the north and south), 2) the high place that Zadok the priest fills in the new monarchy. Up till now Abiathar was Saul's and David's priest. After the taking of Jerusalem, Zadok is always mentioned *before* that of Abiathar. It is possible, though by no means certain, that Zadok represents the integration of the Jebusite priesthood into the faith of Israel. Of course for this to be acceptable to Israel they would have had to accept Yahwist faith (see the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, 76:16).

All of this reorganization finally culminated in an expression of the LORD's will for the kingdom in the Davidic covenant. Just as the saving event of the exodus culminated or issued in a covenant that symbolized the liberation from Egypt and exacted a new relationship, so too does the liberation from the Philistines and surrounding peoples issue in a covenant that both ratifies the new organization and expresses the Lord's continuing plan to bless Israel.

### **Nathan's Prophecy, 2 Sam 7**

The context for Nathan's prophecy is twofold. In chapter 6 David brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. In chapter 7, David expresses his desire to build a house for the Lord, since he has received so much success in the name of the Lord. The prophecy of Nathan is presented as God's immediate response to the two contexts that precede the prophecy (NB Psalm 132).

2 Sam 7:4-17 First of all, the LORD reiterates that he really has no need of a house. It is the Lord who will make a house (a dynasty) for David. Secondly, it will be his descendent who will build a house for the Lord and the throne of his kingdom will be forever. Thereby the presence of a temple like that of the kingdoms around Israel is integrated into Israelite faith. The Lord will be his father, and he will be his son. If the sons sin, they will be chastened but the promise will not be removed.

2 Sam 7:18-29 David responds to the prophecy with humility and wonder, asking that these words truly be confirmed.

There are several features of this dialogue that perhaps are not immediately obvious, which bind Moses and David together on the one hand, and Israel and David together on the other hand. In verse 5, the Lord addresses David as his servant, 'go and tell my servant David'. This structure of the term God's servant plus the actual name is a common idiom almost uniquely used for Moses, Exod 14:31, Num 12: 7,8, Deut 34:5, Josh 1:2,7. On one occasion it is also used for Caleb (Num 14:24), and in six occurrences it is associated also with the person of Job (Job 1:8, 2:3, 42:7,8).

It would appear that the author is deliberately associating David and Moses together. In verse 11, David receives the promise of rest from his enemies. This term for rest for the Deuteronomist was considered a supreme blessing of well being; Israel was given rest for the glory of God's name. But this rest of David is not for himself it is for all the people as well, verse 10. In other words, by commissioning David and confirming him as the leader in a dynastic kingdom, the God of the Hebrews is extending his blessing to all of Israel in the new environment of Canaan. This is similar to the commissioning of Joshua in Deut 31:1-6 where Joshua is commissioned to lead the people and this of course implies a commissioning for the entire people. Just as Israel was continuously saved because of the Lord's great name, so too in this new situation the glory of God's name is to be continually attached to the line of David. 1

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Sam 12:22, *For the Lord will not cast away his people, for his great name's sake.* 2 Sam 7:25-26, ... *and thy name will be magnified forever saying, "The Lord of hosts is God over Israel", and the house of your servant David will be established before you.*

The terminology that is used in this promise to David of Nathan's prophecy and in the summaries of the covenant with David bears striking resemblance to Hittite grants as well as those of Assyrian origin. The Royal grant of Ashurbanipal to Baltaya:

*He whose heart was whole to his Lord served me with faithfulness, walked in perfection in my palace, and kept the charge of my kingship. I considered his good relations with me and decreed a gift for him.*

A Hittite Grant:

*After you, your son and grandson will possess it, no one will take it away from them. If one of your descendants sins, the king will prosecute him, but no one will take away either his house or his land.*

Both of these grants manifest similar idioms to the covenant with Abraham and the covenant with David. The phrase from the grant, "... he kept my charge and walked in faithfulness", is repeated in both covenants.

Gen 26:5, *Because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge ...*  
1 Kings 3:6, *You have shown steadfast love to David my father because he walked before you in faithfulness and in uprightness of heart.*  
1 Kings 3:14, *If you walk in my ways keeping my statutes... .*

The two gifts in the Hittite Grant regarding house and land figure dominantly in the Abrahamic promises and in the Davidic Covenant. Through typology then, David is linked to Abraham, but through his being a servant of the Lord who liberates Israel from the Philistines, David is linked to Moses. In other words, the promises of Abraham and the covenant of Sinai converge in David as a further realization of God's plan. Through David, the blessings of the Lord extend to the people.

The theme of adoption, which is a new image in the Davidic covenant was likewise borrowed from Hittite and Assyrian Grant terminology. In a grant from Suppiluliuma to the vassal Sattiwaza we read: *The king grasped my hand and said, "When I conquer the land of Mitanni, I shall not reject you, I shall make you my son, I will stand by to help you in time of war and I will make you sit on the throne of your father."* This theme of adoption is taken up in the prophecy of Nathan toward David. 2 Sam 7:14, *I will be his father and he will be my son.* This adoption formula was used to legitimize the political status of a leader who is commissioned by the Lord.

Psalm 2:7, *You are my son today I have begotten you.*

Psalm 89:26, *He shall cry to me, "You are my father, my God, the rock of my salvation", and I will make him the first born.*

The unconditionality of the Davidic Covenant is not as simple as it might appear on first sight and it underwent revision through its history of interpretation. As Nathan's oracle now stands both unconditionality and permanence are promised. Matitiahu Tsevat observes an apparent inconsistency between the Lord's promise and David's prayer. The LORD promises permanence and then David asks for permanence. Tsevat believes permanence was not in the original oracle. This anomaly I believe is not as illogical as Tsevat makes it out to be. David is asking for a confirmation of what God has promised in the oracle. The promise is quoted in David's prayer and David is simply asking for the blessing that this promise truly be realized. This form of praying for what God has already promised is strikingly similar to the Abrahamic covenant. The Lord had already promised Abraham land, descendants and blessing, but Abraham sought a sign of ratification by praying for confirmation and this of course issued in a covenant (Genesis 15).

The unconditionality of the promise is somewhat qualified within the oracle itself.

2 Sam 7:14, *When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod such as mortals use, but I will not take my steadfast love from him. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me.*

In the subsequent reiterations of the Davidic covenant, the condition of following in the ways of David and the Lord is more and more highlighted.

1 Kings 3:14, *If you walk in my ways keeping my statutes and my commandments, I will lengthen your days.*

This condition as such does not touch upon the original promise, but it reveals a Deuteronomistic hand that wishes to distinguish between the optimism of the original promise and the false optimism that would arise without a corresponding sense of task or responsibility in response to the gift.

1 Kings 2:4, *If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you a man on the throne of Israel.*

Here we have a clear qualification and condition for the future kings. Though the promise to David is unconditional in some sense, the future blessings require kings whose hearts are like David's and who walk in the ways of the Lord. It is this combination of an unconditional promise of permanence given to David, with a qualification for future generations to walk in the ways of the LORD like David that makes it possible to formulate a messianic hope.

A messianic hope has two presuppositions: a) the basis of the hope rests on a promise in the past, b) the actuality of the promise is not realized in the present but reaches out to the future. It was the unconditional promise to David with the qualifications for future generations that could account for the tragedy of the fall of Judah that made it possible for a messianic hope to be formulated in terms of the Davidic covenant. Images in the prophets that would convey the promise and the tragedy together would be the stump, the root, and the branch. Isaiah 9:6-7, 11:1-5, 16:5, Micah 5:2, Jeremiah 23:5-6, 33:15-16,21, Ezekiel 34:23, 37:24-25.

### **Conclusions:**

The Davidic covenant was a point of convergence in the history of Israelite faith. The promise to Abraham and the mosaic covenant had been partially realized in the loose organization of the tribal league. For the most part, the people relied on the memory of the Exodus, Sinai and deliverance into the land as a basis for their unity. But a serious political challenge called into question their religious affirmation. With the culturally superior Philistine and Canaanite cities threatening Israel's very existence, the question was asked is the God of Israel simply Lord of a distant and past history, of our own relatively small clan? Is God Lord and King in this new situation in which we find ourselves now - a situation which needs reorganization into a centralized kingdom if we are to survive? Under David, the LORD's covenant commitment had been translated into terms that the new sedentary agricultural society could accommodate. God, by raising David as king had proved to be ruler of the cosmos and indeed of all creation. Precisely because of this new realization of the LORD's commitment, the original promise to Abraham and the Sinai covenant retained their power to be the source and meaning of Hebrew life.

A point of convergence integrates and opens up new horizons and vistas. The Davidic covenant was a sign of the validity of the mosaic covenant, but its glory was also a sign of hope in the face of the ensuing tragedies of the fallen kingdoms. There was something permanent about the Davidic promises. No matter what tragedies could befall the people, the God of Israel was understood to be one who would raise up the people from disaster for the sake of the promise to David and to Abraham. Because God is Lord not only of Exodus and Sinai, but also of all creation and all history, God can speak to the people both through the Torah, and through Creation. God not only speaks through the extraordinary saving events within Israel's linear history, but God speaks to those who have ears to hear from everything that is in the cosmos. It is not surprising then to notice that precisely at this time, Israel begins to formulate an explicit theology of creation (Genesis 2-4). Furthermore, in the cultic life expressed in the Psalter, we see how in fact Israel integrated so much of Canaanite pastoral and agricultural rhythms into their own unique expression of God to be the Lord of history and of the cosmos.

### Covenant in the Major Prophets

- A) The Rise of Literary Prophecy in Israel
- B) The Vocation of the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel: Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1, Ezekiel 1-3
- C) The Judgment Against Israel in the Major Prophets
- D) Theologies of Hope in Light of the Covenant Images in the Major Prophets
- E) The Exile (587-537)

#### A) The Rise of Literary Prophecy in Israel

The various images and perspectives that the prophets employ involve a pluralism in theology. Since they cover a large span of time, we see the prophets creating various images that are meant to mediate the faith of Israel in new and changing circumstances. Yet what binds them together is a similarity in style. The promise of life and the call to commitment are inexorably interwoven throughout the major prophetic writings. However the appeal to a particular aspect of a covenant is not quite so definite; prophets are somewhat unique in their use of covenant imagery. The prophets appeal both to the commitment and responsibility of the Sinai covenant, and to the promise of hope and blessing of the Davidic covenant. We have here in the two foundational aspects of prophetic faith a criterion for judging and assessing contemporary movements in theologies: the promise of life and the challenge that the promise evokes must be held in constant tension. Erasmus once wrote with respect to movements in culture and theology, "*To straighten a crooked stick you have to bend it in the opposite direction*".

So with respect to the contrary poles of the covenantal relationship, namely that of gift and responsibility, any inculturation or re-interpretation of covenant will in fact have to stress one side of the polarity while maintaining a union at the same time. The prophets will reject the truncation of one pole from the other. The promise of life that is truncated from the responsibility of justice is shown to be hollow and illusory (Jeremiah). Similarly a notion of fulfilling the law (by sacrifices and rituals) without the interior disposition of the promise of life that issues in a just relationship is shown to be mechanical and hollow (Isaiah).

It is noteworthy to realize that literary prophecy corresponds roughly to the period of Israel's monarchic history. True, Moses was considered a "prophet" along with the "charismatic" prophets of the period of the judges stretching into the monarchy with Nathan and Elijah. In general, a prophet is understood in Israel as "one who gives voice to God". At first, as with Moses, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah and Elisha, such personages would be sought out to establish divine will. However, these charismatic or court prophets are not remembered so much for what

they *taught* as for what they *did*. Their teaching had not yet been organized or collated into a unified message. Literary prophecy can be understood as the collation of a prophet's teaching into a message for "all of Israel". In other words, a specific oracle, which might have been occasioned by a concrete political crisis (as Isaiah's critique of a treaty between Judah and Egypt in 701) becomes a message for all of Israel.

What is unique in Israel's prophetic movement? Prophecy of course existed throughout the entire Mesopotamian, Canaanite and Egyptian worlds. It was often linked with divination, employing the casting of dice, the dissecting of animals in order to discover divine favour or to thwart divine wrath. Some of these original techniques of prophecy are seen to be operative in Israel as well, such as the casting of lots (the *gorallot*, something like dice, see 1 Sam 14:37-42). But more and more, even during the early period of prophecy in Israel, what begins to be placed in greater relief by the prophets is a personal relationship to God and the stress of God's word understood as justice (this is especially noticeable in Nathan who is clearly a "court prophet" yet is concerned with justice and righteousness). Ethics becomes increasingly more dominant in Israel's unique prophetic movement until we can safely state that for literary prophecy ethics and moral conduct become the hallmarks of prophetic faith. The prophets have become "the conscience of Israel" (Abraham Heschel).

It was Israel's covenantal relationship with God that would colour and even transform Israel's borrowing of the prophetic role from other cultures. For it is the covenant with God, primarily the Mosaic covenant, but also the Davidic covenant, that sets forth before the imagination of king and people alike the ethical demands of justice and righteousness. A convergence between the Sinai and Davidic covenants can be seen in their emphasis on justice. The laws of the Sinai covenant are *Torah* that mediate justice. The role of the Davidic king is to rule/serve as God does, namely with justice and righteousness. The Sinai covenant stresses the people's **commitment** to the justice of the *Torah*; the Davidic covenant stresses God's **gift** of a king and a place where justice and righteousness would reign.

The unique language of literary prophecy (sometimes called classical prophecy, biblical prophets, or the writing prophets) appears onto the scene of Israel in the 8th century in the Northern Kingdom with Amos and Hosea. This form of writing is actually quite stylized so that the reader immediately recognizes this form of literary prophecy. It is characterized by three essential components:

- 1) There is a personal, if not always an intimate, relationship between the prophet and God
- 2) There are a series of oracles and judgments that uncover the injustice, apostasy or faithlessness of the people Israel and other nations alike.
- 3) No matter how thorough the analysis of injustice may be throughout the prophet's judgement against Israel, the prophet offers a vision of hope that is meant either to appeal to the people to effect conversion, or to be a basis of hope for a broken people.



All three of these components of prophetic language can be seen to be crystallized in the introduction of prophetic oracles, "*kol 'amar 'adonai* - thus says the LORD". Such a statement is authoritative because of the prophet's relationship to God. It is an introduction that gives voice *either* to God's judgement against Israel and the nations, *or* to God's promise of salvation and restoration. The teaching function of prophetic oracles can be gleaned from the many images, parables and stories the prophets use to bring the hearer or reader into the moral analysis applied to Israel.

## **B) The Vocations of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel**

### 1) Isaiah 6

We do have three definite historical events that cover the time frame of Isaiah's prophetic practise.

- a) the year King Uzaiah died, 742,
- b) the fall of Samaria (the northern kingdom), 722,
- c) Sennacherib invades and attacks Jerusalem (the attack fails), 701.

The vocational passage of Isaiah is organized into three scenes:

- a) action of Isaiah and the Seraphs around the LORD (vision)
- b) action of the Seraphs to Isaiah (investiture)
- c) dialogue between the LORD and the prophet

The Seraphim are described as standing above the LORD. In pictures, the healing serpents of Egypt are often located above the deities or the cultic place to denote protection - they are also a sign of immortality.

These images that describe Isaiah's vision stress God's transcendence. For Isaiah God is the Holy One, who is powerful and terrible. God's transcendence cannot be bridged or controlled. So the edge of the LORD's mantle filling the temple is an image that reveals God's mastery over all creation. The LORD cannot be limited to the temple.

The seraph brings a burning coal to purify Isaiah. "*Woe to me, I have been silent, because I am a man of unclean lips, but now my eyes have seen the King, LORD, Sabaoth*".

This experience of Isaiah being touched by a burning coal signifies purification. It manifests a personal relationship between God and the prophet. God has effected a transformation in Isaiah, which of course gives the prophet a power to speak.

The mission: The actual content of God's mission for Isaiah stresses the negative

judgment against Israel. Israel will first have to be destroyed and only then will a new hope be forged from the destruction.

We have a theological problem in the oracle that is not unlike the problem of the LORD hardening the heart of Pharaoh. The prophet is actually called to declare words of judgment that will "make" the people stubborn. They will hear and not understand; they will see but not perceive. The solution to this difficulty is also similar to that used for the phrase applied to Pharaoh, "*the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart*".

1) the word of God is not without an effect. If conversion is not the immediate result of God's word, it prepares the subject for a new punishment; it actually reveals the hardening of the heart and prepares the subject for yet another crisis.

2) The word of God, which does not lead to conversion, is judgment and punishment.

3) The prophet has the paradoxical awareness that the word of God might convert a few, but that essentially it is a word of judgment.

The words that the LORD utters to Isaiah for transmission are not the exact words that the prophet is to transmit to the people. In fact, throughout the exercising of his mission, Isaiah does not repeat them. These words of God explain the contours of the mission of Isaiah: "Go and speak to this people, place the facts before them as I placed it before them in Egypt, but realize that they will not understand, in fact your word will harden their hearts and they will react against my word so that you will have to pronounce a new round of punishment". But not every avenue of hope is blocked. The stubbornness of the people will not engulf the people as a whole. The final image of the stump, which will give forth new shoots, provides a basis for hope within the proclamation of on-coming disaster.

## 2) Jeremiah 1

The 13th year of Josiah's (640-609) reign would place the vocation of Jeremiah in the year 627 (Jer 25:3) cf. 2 K 21:24–23:30.

Note the phrase "the word of the Lord came to him" 14:1, 46:1, 47:1, 49:34.

1:1-3	the time frame
1:4-10	the vocation
1:11-19	the explanation of the mission through an interpretation of imagery

### *Jeremiah and Moses:*

There are several similarities that would appear to indicate a deliberate parallel between Moses and Jeremiah.

1:6 = Exod 4:10	the feeling of a lack of eloquence, feeling like a child before God.
1:7b = Exod 7:2	You shall speak all that I command you, intercession, Ex 32, Nu 14:13-35
1:9 = Deut 18:18	I will put my words into his mouth
1:7 = Exod 2:6	child ( <i>na'ar</i> ).
1:5 = Exod 2:1-10	being formed in the womb, the concern of God for Moses at his birth

Though all the prophets are understood as having a personal relationship with God, for Jeremiah this relationship is conveyed through intimate terms. God actually calls Jeremiah by his name (Jer 1:11); God touches his mouth with his hand (1:9); they dialogue together, one on one. For Isaiah and Ezekiel, their personal relationship to God is described more through transcendent imagery, which highlights the awesome power, freedom and majesty of God. This uniqueness of Jeremiah's intimate relationship with God is confirmed in the confessions or laments of Jeremiah (Jer 11:18-20; 12:1-4; 15:10-18; 20:7-18). Here in these laments, Jeremiah appears so rooted in his God, that he is able to criticize and even accuse God of having abandoned him in his faithfulness to God's word. Even in his laments, Jeremiah uses intimate imagery, "*You have seduced (or enticed, deceived) me, and I let myself be seduced (Jer 20:7)*".

The emphasis on having being called from his mother's womb is meant to highlight the activity of God's forming Jeremiah and consecrating him prophet. His mission is directly from the LORD. In v 10 the word, I have set you (*hifqadtika*), is not ordinarily associated with the establishment of a prophet but with that of a civil governor.

Three images are used to convey the strength of Jeremiah in the face of the resistance of the people.

- a) The *bronze wall* = because God is with him, 1:18 also 15:20.
- b) The *fortified city*, echoes 1:15 - the invading northern nations (after punishment comes defense).
- c) The *column of iron*, iron was considered at that time the hardest of metals.

See also Jer 15:16 - When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.

### 3) Ezekiel 1-3 / 5th year from the deportation of Jehoiakin (592).

- 1 a – the theophany, the LORD meets the prophet.
- 2:1-7 b – the sending vv 1-5, confirming v 6, sending v 7.
- 2:8–3:3 C – investiture for the mission.
- 3:4-11 b' – the sending v 4, confirming vv 8-9, sending vv 10-11.
- 3:12-15 a' – the prophet separates from the LORD.

3:16-19 – the responsibility of the prophet.

The concentric structure of the vocational text sets into relief the middle section of the passage: the investiture of the eating of the scroll. The central affirmation in the vocation is the call for Ezekiel to consume the word of God and to go and speak to the house of rebellious Israel.

Ezek 1, which describes an elaborate and perhaps even a confused vision, is organized around the verb, "to see". It finally concludes with an act of worship "I saw, fell on my face and heard". As such the passage constitutes a majestic introduction, even more so than that of Isaiah, which describes the majesty of God who can effect great changes. In Isaiah, the edge of the mantle filled the temple to symbolize God's universal presence and power; Ezekiel will have God moving about the universe to symbolize the same freedom and power of God. God's glory will actually leave Jerusalem (Ezek 10, notice the similar imagery taken up here from chapter one, sapphire, cherubim, seraphim, wheelwork, the sound of the wings of the creatures, etc.).

The vision is something different in Ezekiel from the other prophets, though it obviously has parallels to the majestic vision of Isaiah. But with Ezekiel there is no clear image of God that follows with an explanation. The vocation of Ezekiel is clouded in mystery and transcendence. Of all three prophets, the relationship between Ezekiel and God is the least personal or intimate. Notice that he is the only one who says nothing. All the verbs associated with Ezekiel are seeing, hearing, standing, and eating. He is actually quite passive; it is the Spirit of God that makes him stand up and moves him around. He does not actually speak to God in the vocational passage as do both Isaiah and Jeremiah. His personal act is that of eating the scroll. It is this act that shows Ezekiel "consuming" and "interiorizing" the word of God.

There are present in the vision various cosmic elements such as the heavens, clouds, wind, fire, water, and the rainbow. It is possible that the flames which pass through the animals in 1:13 allude to a covenant that is being established between the people and the LORD in this vision (cf. Jer 34:16-19). The firmament and many waters in 1:24 could be an allusion to a new creation. Thus, we have the image of a prophet carried by the hand of the LORD, open to a cosmic vision, who was being prepared to transmit a message, which was to realize a new creation. Certainly it is Ezekiel more than any other prophet who will speak of a new exodus, a new law, a new kingdom, an everlasting covenant, a new creation.

(Note the Glory of God in 10:18, 11:22)

### **C) The Judgment Against Israel in the Major Prophets**

#### **1) ISAIAH**

For Isaiah, the moral collapse of Israel is defined through terms of social and political injustice: 1:12-20, 24-31; 10:1-4; 28; 30:1-2; 31:1-2. Isaiah never appeals to the Sinai covenant explicitly. Yet the impending judgment against Israel can only be understood in light of the Law. Isaiah watches over the Law. It is this Law of justice, which is the great blessing of Israel. The

administration of justice is what displays Israel's attitude to God.

For out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the word of the LORD  
from Jerusalem (Isa 2:3-4).

The images that Isaiah uses to accentuate the moral depravity inherent in abandoning the law are varied.

- The degenerate city: 1:21-23.
- The unfruitful vineyard: 5:1-30 (notice the rare positive use of vineyard imagery in 27:6)

The image of the vineyard is one that expresses well the covenant between God and Israel. The image contains nuances that move into semantic range of matrimony (Hosea 1-3), for the vineyard is a symbol of love and of the loved one (Canticle 1:6-14; 2:15, 8:12, Psalm 128).

The metaphor of the vine and the vineyard is perhaps the most consistently used image in the prophetic writings. Although on the surface level, the image of a vine and the vineyard is a positive one that conjures up before our imagination the exquisite fruit of human labour, in the prophets the image is turned around to represent destruction. This is understandable, because the prophets elicit from the reader the abhorrence of seeing an image of life and fruitfulness destroyed. Of course they wish to draw the reader's attention to the destruction of life that injustice and faithlessness to the Torah embodies.

### Social Criticism

Isaiah rejects the arrogance that stemmed from a false trust in the Davidic line, which rooted Israel's status with God in pagan fashion; that is in blood, soil and cult. True trust in God means trusting in God's providence and not in political maneuverings. There is no bond with injustice, no hemming in God's promise because of blood and soil, no counting on covenant promises through religiosity. Isaiah roots the oracles into God's free love for Israel, the favour that had been shown to them and in their solemn agreement to accept God as King. Since Israel was so unfaithful to Yahwism, since the practice of injustice, exploitation so violated covenant law the final message would be one of judgment.

The wealthy class in Judah were not better than in Israel. Paganism necessarily involved a breach in covenant law. Landholders callously oppressed the poor, often through dishonest means.

Judges were corrupt — Isa 1:21-23, 5:23, 3:13-15, 25:1-7,8

Rich lived in luxury without concern — Isa 3:16, 4:1, 5:11,23; 10:1-4

Official religion offered no rebuke — Isa 1:10-17

Even priests were corrupt — Isa 28:1-13 (cf. Micah 3:5-8, 9-11; 2:11)

The following are some key references to the use of vineyard imagery with negative connotations in the prophetic writings:

- Isaiah 5:1-30; 24:7; 32:9-15
- Jeremiah 2:21; 5:10; 6:9; 8:13; 12:10
- Ezekiel 15; 17; 19:10-14
- Hosea 2, 10:1-4,
- Joel 1
- Amos 5
- Zephaniah 1:13

## 2) JEREMIAH

Jeremiah's understanding of what ails Israel and what Israel needs is actually expressed in quite different images from that of Isaiah. The basic sin of Israel in Jeremiah's vision is that of apostasy and of unfaithfulness to the LORD, 2:5-9; 3:6-10; 18:13-17. Superficial reform is not enough, 6:19-21; 8:4-22; 14:11. Even though Jeremiah is a prophet thoroughly ensconced in the Jerusalem tradition, he shows himself to be rooted in the Sinaitic theological tradition. The covenant of Sinai is not the only backdrop for the proclamation of Israel's unfaithfulness, but it provides the explicit terminology for Jeremiah's preaching and judgment (11:1-5,6-17; 7:21-25).

The image of a future Davidic King is not lost in Jeremiah, this tradition was too strong for Jeremiah not to employ. But it certainly takes second place to the main thrust which involves Jeremiah's exhortation for a total transformation of Israel's attitude to God, 23:5-7; 30:8-10; 33:19-26.

Jeremiah branded the popular trust in the promises of Zion and David as a fraud and a lie (7:1-15; 26:1-6). In both cases, Jeremiah attempts to explode the false trust that originates in conceiving unconditional promises that are separated from faithfulness to God in action. Jeremiah retorts, that if the people and the rulers do not obey the will of God then the promises will disappear. The wilderness experience is idealized in the prophetic writings of Jeremiah because at that time when Israel was so weak they trusted and followed the will of God (Jer 2:2). Trusting in God is an ideal for Jeremiah.

In Jeremiah's critique of Israel's faithlessness we detect a stress on interiority, on the motivation of the heart and mind in people's actions. This is where Jeremiah wishes to effect a change. "*Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, remove the foreskin of your hearts* (Jer 4:4)"; (see also 17:9-10; 31:31-34).

Other images that Jeremiah uses to characterize the faithlessness of Israel and Judah and the ensuing judgment and destruction are:

- the destroyed or fruitless vine: Jeremiah 2:21; 5:10; 6:9; 8:13; 12:10
- the Ark of the Covenant is no more and will never be rebuilt: 3:16 (cf. 2 Macc

2:4).

- the broken covenant: 11:1-17;
- the decayed linen loin-cloth: 13:1-11
- the wine-jars will make the inhabitants and rulers drunk: 13:12-14
- the great drought: 14
- the potter and the clay 18:1-11.
- the broken earthen-ware jug: 19:1-13
- the good and bad figs: 24
- the cup of God's wrath: 25:15-29
- the wooden and iron yokes: 27-28

### 3) EZEKIEL

Ezekiel continues the genre of prophetic teaching - judgment against Israel, against the nations and future restoration. But there are some notable differences. Ezekiel does not rely solely on the authority of the prophetic office to convince. Ezekiel attempts to reason with his listeners. This is evident in his treatment of the guilt of the nations and individual responsibility (chapter 18). Ezekiel tried to provide a rational basis for the exiles' hope. He distinguished the responsibility of the nation as a whole from the responsibility of the individual. This is quite new in the theology of Israel.

When Ezekiel speaks of sins, he presents them within the ambit of particular offenses against sacral orders. Social and moral commandments and imperatives are less noted than in both Isaiah and Jeremiah. (But note, the poor and needy, 16:49; the oppression of the resident alien, 18:12; the plight of the orphan and the widow, 22:7 and the practice of extortion, 22:29). Israel has defiled the sanctuary, 5:11; has turned to other cults 8:7; the Israelites have taken idols into their hearts, 16:3; even the leaders of temple and cult the cultic prophets and priests are unfaithful, 13; 34. Not that social evils are excluded, 9:9. The guilt of the houses of Israel and Judah is described as being exceedingly great; the land is full of blood and the city full of injustice. However the emphasis on cultic offenses corroborates the general impression of the priestly orientation in Ezekiel. The basic imagery that is utilized in his theological construct is that of the temple and the cult.

Even more so than in Isaiah and in Jeremiah, Ezekiel understands the sin of Israel to be so deep-rooted, that a new exodus, a new act of redemption is in order. Whereas Jeremiah and Hosea had idealized the wilderness experience as an ideal first love in which Israel at the beginning followed the LORD, Ezekiel emphasizes that even then Israel sinned, 20:1-31; 23.

## **D) Theologies of Hope in Light of the Covenant Images in the Major Prophets**

### 1) ISAIAH'S HOPE

Isaiah's strategy for offering hope to a people who felt the loss of favour with God in their social and political life was to turn to the Zion tradition and specifically to the Davidic covenant.

Images of hope:

- a) God's anger against the nations 34, 19:23-24.
- b) Zion 26:1-2; 28:16; 30:19; 31:4-5; 33:5-6; (2:3-4; 14:32).
- c) David 9:2-7; 11:1-12 (12:1-6 Psalm of Thanksgiving); 32:1-6.
- d) Law, Teaching 1:10; 2:3-4; 7:9; 8:16,20; 24:5 everlasting covenant.
- e) Remnant, 10:19-27; (11:1, 10, 16); 35:1-10.
- f) New creation, 11:6-9; 30:23-26.

Isaiah's teaching was based on the two traditions of Jerusalem, that of Zion and that of David. But for the basis of this hope Isaiah turned completely into the future. Isaiah looked to the future with a hope and a trust that the LORD would deliver Zion, the city of David, and raise up an anointed one - the new David. Trusting in the Davidic promises in the face of calamity for Isaiah is the crucial condition for the LORD actually to bring them about. In this way, Isaiah's trust in the promises of the LORD is no naive trust; it is a faithful attitude towards the LORD, which corresponds to keeping justice and righteousness in one's social life. Essentially, Isaiah is working theologically with the promises and gift of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenant.

Note: the priestly writers essentially take up this position in their reworking of covenant theology.

### 2) JEREMIAH'S HOPE

The primary covenant image which underlies Jeremiah's presentation of hope is that of the Sinai covenant, although there are three references to the Davidic covenant as well. The awful chasm between the demands of the LORD's covenant by which the nations had been judged and the promises which faith could not surrender had been bridged by God's love. It is the LORD who is about to bring a new situation into being. The exiles will be saved and they will be transformed (Jer 24:4-7). The transformation is to be achieved in their hearts and in their attitude. This of course is clearly emphasized in the prophecy of the new covenant, which is linked to the past faithfulness of the LORD.

- |          |   |   |
|----------|---|---|
| 30:12-15 | — | Israel's sin is described as incurable  |
| 31:1-9   | — | the LORD's faithfulness is affirmed   |
| 31:31-34 | — | a new covenant is anticipated being forged in the heart, contrasted with the stones of Sinai. |
| 32:36-41 | — | one heart, one way, and an everlasting covenant   |



Notice that the content of this new covenant is actually the same as that of Sinai. The law here will be within each person, it will be written on the heart. What is new is the actual incarnation of the covenant in these new circumstances in which the Israelites find themselves. So for Jeremiah the hope for Israel rests on their renewed commitment to the LORD which will be effected by the LORD's faithful love.

Jeremiah also makes references to a future Davidic King (23:5-7; 30:8-10; 33:14-26). It is interesting to note where the emphasis is placed in the first reference. In 23:5-7, Jeremiah refers to the "righteous Branch" that will spring up from David to inaugurate a hope in another exodus. So even in recalling the hope of the Davidic covenant Jeremiah emphasises the salvific aspect of this hope for Israel. Of course, as with Isaiah, this hope looks to the future (the remnant: 24:4-7, 30:1-3, 31:1-26, 32:26-44, 46:27-28).

Note that it will be the Deuteronomists who will take up Jeremiah's unique insights and apply them to Israel's monarchic history.

### 3) EZEKIEL'S HOPE

In Ezekiel, we see an even more thorough blending of the Mosaic and David traditions that the prophet effects in presenting hope to the exiles. The radical sin of Israel will be met by a new Exodus and a new creation initiated by God. The Sinai tradition dominates in Ezekiel, but more in fusion with the Davidic promises. Under the new David, Israel will obey the commandments because God will give a new heart and a new spirit to Israel.

- 11:14-21 — a new heart, a new spirit, heart of stone, heart of flesh (Jer 31:31; 32:39-40)
- 16:59-63 — "*... you have despised the oath, breaking the covenant. Yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and establish an everlasting covenant.*" The giftedness of this restoration will be so tremendous that they will be dumbfounded. God in restoring Israel will show a love and faithfulness that will confound and transform Israel.
- 20:33-44 — a new exodus with another covenant, desert (cf. 28:25-26)
- 34:1-24 — the image of God as a saving shepherd - David is prince; the LORD is God
- 34:25-31 — an interesting fusion of Davidic promises and Sinai covenant, covenant of peace.
- 37:24-28 — another fusion of Davidic promises and the Sinai covenant.
- 36:22-32 — a new heart and a new spirit, a re-establishment of the Sinai covenant, but on the heart and with the spirit, sprinkle with clean water
- 37:1-14 — a new creation, the dry bones, the remnant, "*they shall be my people and I shall be their God*".
- 37:15-23 — the two sticks
- 40--46 — the new temple

In all three cases, it should be observed that the realization of hope actually points to the future. The rootedness of the prophets in a calling from God gives them an authoritative voice for people who wish to hear. But their analysis of the disorder of Israel's faith which is revealed in injustice, idolatry and apostasy points to a future creative act of God toward the remnant of Israel. To a great extent, it was the prophetic voice of Israel's literary prophets that allowed the Israelites to reformulate their faith during the crises of the exile. They provided a language that would help explain the tragedy of the loss of King, Temple and Land and yet offer concrete hope for a restored relationship. The prophetic voice in literary prophecy has three characteristic modalities: a) their voice encounters *resistance* which is a sign of their authenticity and integrity; there are no ulterior motives of gain for their preaching. b) their preaching is dominated by an *ethical perspective* of justice based on Israel's relationship with God. c) God is one who cares to be angry and to intervene, both to support and to express rage.

**E) The Exile (587-537)**

The challenge that the Babylonian exile brought to Israelite faith cannot be overestimated. All the primary external expressions of their relationship to God were destroyed, the Temple, the King and the Land. It was the prophetic movement that allowed for a new language of faith to be articulated from under the rubble of the exilic period. Ever since the Sinai covenant bonded Israel with their God, politics and faith for the Israelites were forever intertwined. So it is not surprising to see that such a major political upheaval as the exile would have repercussions on Israel's faith.

**a) the historical ramifications of the exile**

Though the exile is ordinarily understood to have begun with the destruction of the temple and the deportation of the ruling class from Judah to Babylon in 587, its origins actually can be noted some ten years earlier with the first deportation. [**The Lachish Letters**, consisting of twenty one *ostraca* (pieces of pottery) from roughly 589-588 relate the last days of the town (south of Jerusalem) before its fall at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. The letters describe the political maneuverings of seeking help from Egypt and downfall of smaller outposts prior to the final collapse].

Judah was actually caught in the political upheavals of the surrounding empires of Egypt and Babylon. It was these two empires that were clashing for possession of the trade routes of Syria and Judah. In 605 one of the largest military clashes of ancient history took place at Charchemish (in Syria) between Egyptian forces led by the Pharaoh, Nebo, and the rising Babylonian forces led by Nebuchadnezzar. This defeat of Egypt forced Judah to change alliance (and pay tribute) to Babylon from 605-602. In 602, Nebuchadnezzar received a minor setback at the hands of Egyptian forces and this prompted Jehoiakim (son of Josiah) to rely on Egypt's promising aid (which never arrived) and to withhold tribute to Babylon. This led to the first Babylonian siege of Jerusalem (Egypt was nowhere to be seen) in 598. Jehoiakim mysteriously dies (he is probably assassinated for the mistaken trust of relying on Egypt) and his son Jehoiachin is king for two months. He saved the city by surrendering it to the Babylonians in 597, but is led into exile with his whole family and some others of the leaders of Judah. Notice that Ezekiel receives his vocation to prophecy while he was among the exiles in Tel-Abib, belonging to this first wave of exiles.

While the legitimate king Jehoiachin will remain in exile for some 37 years (thus being the last surviving Davidic King of the unbroken line), his uncle, Zedekiah, was put in charge of Judah by the Babylonians. Zedekiah, like his brother, Jehoiakim, was led by the pro-Egyptian party of Judah to side with Egypt and rebel against Babylon. All this was done against the advice of Jeremiah who preached acceptance of Babylon's might as a sign of divine retribution. Nebuchadnezzar comes against Jerusalem in full force and lays siege in 588. Zedekiah tries to flee after a breach in the walls had been achieved but is caught near Jerico. He is blinded and his

sons killed along with anyone else of his line who could lay claim to the throne. Then Jerusalem is destroyed. The walls were torn down; the temple itself was destroyed, the remaining vessels taken to Babylon. The deportation of the ruling class to Babylon consisted of some 4,600 (which numbered probably only the males) according to Jeremiah 52:28-30.

This time the Babylonians placed Gedaliah in charge of the district as governor. So Judah now has become affixed to the Babylonian Empire. Since the city Jerusalem had been rendered somewhat uninhabitable he moved the administration to Mizpah to the NW of Jerusalem. Jeremiah was allowed to remain because the Babylonians interpreted his preaching as representing a pro-Babylonian position. When Gedaliah, who is seen as one who collaborates with Babylon, is assassinated along with his officials, Jeremiah's disciples fear that the prophet would be seen as an accomplice in the assassination. So these refugees fled to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them (see Jer 41-43). There might have been a third deportation to Babylon, but we know precious little of what occurred in Judah between 585-537.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> What happened to the ark of the covenant? For references to the actual destruction of the temple and its vessels we have three sources: 2 Kgs 25:1-21; Jer 39:1-10, 52:3-30; 2 Chron 36:15-21. These sources describe briefly the ravaging of the temple along with the destruction of Jerusalem. No reference is made to the actual destruction of the ark (it was no longer the small, easily moveable house of the tablets). But Jeremiah seems to refer to its destruction in Jer 3:16-17, "... it shall not come to mind, or be remembered, or missed; nor shall another one be made. At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD ...". The idea that it was hidden in a cave near Mt Nebo ironically is attributed to a source of Jeremiah in a later tradition, 2 Maccabees 2:1-8. Here Jeremiah is said to have hidden the ark, the tent, and the altar of incense, which await revelation in the future. This idea was also taken up in another apocryphal work, *The Lives of the Prophets*. It seems most likely, that the ark of the covenant was destroyed along with everything else that was not taken to Babylon. The Books of Maccabees recount the rededication of the temple during the Hasmonean Period, after 165 B.C. In such a context, they refer to the memory of the ark of the first temple period. Notice that the film "Raiders of the Lost Ark", which has the Ark buried secretly in an Egyptian burial tomb, is combining the Maccabean tradition with that of Jeremiah being taken to Egypt. Yet another popular tradition follows the ark of the covenant to Ethiopia and is present in a Christian Church there to this day.

**b) the theological ramifications of the exile**

The crisis of faith that the exile brought about cannot be overestimated. What is truly surprising is that Israelites were able to emerge from the crisis with a faith that was both penetrating and hopeful. To a large extent, this possibility of creating a new language of faith rested on the experience and preaching of the prophets.

The major signs of Israel's religious institutions are destroyed. King, Temple and Land are gone. Where are the promises of the Davidic covenant? What has happened to the covenant of Sinai; are we still God's special people, or has God once and for all abandoned us? What remains of the ancient promises given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? It would have been quite conceivable, on one level, for Israelite faith to pass on to oblivion as did so many other religions of the ancient world. Of course to identify Israelite faith with the external signs of their religious practices would miss the importance that the word, the Torah, had in the inner constitution of their faith.

The exile became a time when in fact the earlier writings were actually collated and condensed. It is interesting to note that whereas for the prophets the focus of hope was straining toward the future establishment of the Davidic and Sinaitic promises, two massive theological traditions reinterpret Israel's history through the lenses of covenantal theology. The Deuteronomistic tradition relies heavily on the tradition of Sinai, continuing the vision of interiority of the prophet Jeremiah. This tradition integrates Israel's history of promise and responsibility around the call to conversion. The Priestly tradition relies heavily on the Davidic traditions, but reaches even further back to Abraham, to Noah and even to creation to present an optimistic and hopeful vision of faith. In this, the Priestly tradition continues the prophetic visions of Isaiah and Ezekiel. This tradition integrates Israel's (and even the entire world's) history of promise and responsibility around the gift of creation, the gift of Israel and the gift of faith that becomes the basis of hope for a wounded people.

With the deuteronomistic and priestly traditions, we can especially note the theological creativity of adapting older religious traditions into visions that mediate a new religious language for a people in new circumstances. Both traditions appeal to contrary poles of the covenant continuum - gift and promise / commitment and responsibility.

## **Deuteronomy**

### **The covenant of Moab -- a covenant of conversion**

#### **A) THE REWORKING OF COVENANT THEOLOGY**

A line of development of the understanding of covenant can be traced in the major covenant forms that we have studied to date. Within the accounts present in the pentateuch, the concept of the covenant is inaugurated with the initiative of the Lord. This covenant is conceived and presented as a covenant of promise, first to Abraham. This covenant of promise is partially fulfilled at Sinai but is reworked and elaborated into a covenant of commitment. At the time of the monarchy, the concept of the covenant of promise was elaborated also in monarchic terms. The covenant of promise is realized in the personage of David, and Israel itself participates in this promise by virtue of being the beneficiary of all the blessings associated with the monarchy - Israel participating fully in civilization. The crisis of faith within the monarchy spurred on by syncretistic elements and even apostasy forced a re-working of the covenant of promise that would follow the lines of the covenants of Abraham and David, but which would also point to the future, thereby allowing for the contemporary catastrophes. The prophetic movement addressed both the ethical dimension of the covenantal relationship between Israel and God and the catastrophe that follows from the breaking of faithfulness to this ethical stance. New hope was realized in the postulation of messianism, which took its root in the great figure of David, a messiah who would come to realize the promise that is assured to the line of David.

A question arises in light of this development of the concept of covenant. In the face of tragedy, the covenant of promise issued in a theology of messianism. But the covenant, which stressed the pole of commitment and ethical responsibility, was deeply rooted in the traditional faith of Israel. Would it not also lead to a re-working of its fundamental thrust in light of the tragedies of the split kingdom and the exile into Babylon? In the face of failure and crisis, the optimistic hope of the davidic/abrahamic covenants issues in the hope of messianism. The hope of a messiah combines both the promise and the concrete reality of its non-fulfillment into a vision, which projects the sure realization of the promise into the future. It would appear that a legitimate question could be asked with regard to the Sinai covenant. What happens to the image of the mosaic covenant in light of the very same challenges and crises that Israel underwent after the split between the northern and southern kingdoms and the eventual demise of the monarchy? The notion of a messiah projected into the future is not entirely lacking within the development of the mosaic tradition (cf. Deut 18:15-18 in light of Deut 34:10 = Num 12:6-8). Yet this image of a new Moses worked into a theology of covenant in the Scriptures was never developed in the same way and with the same force as the Davidic messiah. Only a few allusions to the messiah as a new Moses can be found in the prophets. In fact it would appear that this theological concept was a late development. The Psalms of Solomon, an apocryphal work of the first century BC, show traces of a well-developed image of the messiah using features of the person of Moses.

In light of the great deuteronomic tradition, what we discover in the theology of the covenant is a rather new twist. In Deuteronomy, the mosaic covenant was developed into a theology of conversion. A covenant in Moab that was understood in terms of conversion and salvation integrated the promise of life associated with the ethical demands of Sinai and the negligence of Israel to be faithful to these covenant conditions. A theology of conversion then is the hallmark of the deuteronomic re-working of the mosaic covenant tradition.

## **B) THE TEXT OF DEUTERONOMY**

The entire text of Deuteronomy is important in the issue of its covenant theology because the entire book is treated as a covenant document. The covenant formulary, known through the courts of the ancient world, provided a literary means for organizing and developing a covenant theology of conversion and redemption.

W. Martin de Wette (1805) set into motion the critical study of Deuteronomy with the ingenious thesis that Deuteronomy corresponds to the book that was supposedly found in the temple during its restoration in 621 (2Kings 22–23). This newly found book which is described as having such a powerful impact on Israel under Josiah became the rallying point for the Josiah reform. The book must have been composed shortly before the Josiah reform in the 7th century.

There are two sets of reasons to support this thesis. The first is the threatening characteristic that the book found in the temple had for anyone who read or heard it. This characteristic which the original book must have had would correspond to the curses that we read in Deut 27-28. The second set of reasons concerns the various measures of reform undertaken by Josiah which find their counterparts precisely in the book of Deuteronomy.

a) the centralization of the cult	2Kgs 23:5,8,19	= Deut 12; 16
b) the celebration of the Passover	2Kgs 23:21-23	= Deut 16:1-8
c) the abolition of cults		
to the stars	2Kgs 23:4,5,11	= Deut 17:3
d) the abolition of the high places,		
the steles, the Ashterah	2Kgs 23:4,5,13-15,19	= Deut 12:2-3, 16:21-22
e) forbidding temple prostitution	2Kgs 23:7	= Deut 18-19
f) forbidding other pagan cults	2Kgs 23:10,24	= Deut 18:10-11

This thesis of de Wette is significant because it gives us a firm chronological date for a book of the Pentateuch. However, matters are never so simple when it comes to redaction criticism. At the end of the last century the approach of literary criticism tried to pin-point what part of the present book of Deuteronomy could be considered the original book found in the temple during Josiah's time, the "Urdeuteronomium". It was generally believed that the book could not have been as long as the present book actually is. Moreover, with redaction criticism, scholars began to see a history of joining parts and redaction in the present text of Deuteronomy. Scholarship arrived at an impasse with the various theories proposing which exact parts

constituted the original book. At first it was generally assumed that chs. 12–27 formed the primitive text found in the temple. Chapters 5–11 and 28 were added to the main body because of similar themes and because they provided a clear framework for the laws.

What gave new impetus to the study of Deuteronomy was form criticism which attempts to discern the literary forms employed in a text as well as the situation which would likely have given rise to such a form. It was assumed that the creation of a unique literary form had a concrete context or situation in life that gave rise to the form. For instance the literary form of a prophetic oracle of judgement which begins with "Thus says the Lord", had its cultural origin in prophetic teaching during the monarchy. Preaching the "good news" of Christ of the early Christians was the "setting in life" that gave rise to a new literary genre of the "Gospels" – a literary form which combines teaching with the recounting of a person's life, word and deeds. This "setting in life" which relates to the particular "literary form" that it engenders is often referred to by its German originators *Sitz im Leben*, which literally means, "setting in life". Von Rad was one of the first promoters of this method for Deuteronomy after Gunkel had introduced it for the Psalms.

From a surface reading, the book presents itself as a unity of four great discourses of Moses pronounced at the doorstep of the Promised Land on the east side of the Jordan in the land of Moab. The time frame for the discourses is the vigil of Moses' death - his farewell speech before Israel enters into Canaan. The discourses exude a quality of urgency - they are the last will and testament of Moses to his people.

Each of the discourses begins with a characteristic phrase, which introduce the speech of Moses.

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 1:1-4:40    | These are the words which Moses spoke.<br><i>'eleh hadevarim asher diber Moshe</i> אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה |
| 4:44-28:68  | This is the law which Moses set<br><i>vez'ot hattorah 'asher sham Moshe ...</i> וְזֹאת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר־שָׂם מֹשֶׁה...      |
| 28:69-32:52 | These are the words of the covenant<br><i>'eleh divrey haberit</i> אֵלֶּה דְּבָרֵי הַבְּרִית                                |
| 33:1        | This is the blessing<br><i>vz'ot haberakha 'asher berakh Moshe...</i> וְזֹאת הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַךְ מֹשֶׁה...            |

This chapter is an appendix narrating the death of Moses and the change of authority to Joshua.

These phrases which share a stylistic similarity delimit the speeches of Moses into four



major parts. However, if we examine the contents of these sections, it becomes clear that these introductions to the speeches of Moses provide simply a surface organization of the book. They do not correspond to the thematic differences or similarities between the major sections. Von Rad, using the literary forms of the various writings that make up Deuteronomy, observed a clear internal organization of the book.

- 1) 1–11 – These opening chapters contain various descriptions of the historical events from Sinai up to the present situation in Moab. The historical description is cast in a parenetic style through which the homilies of Moses are expressed.
- 2) 12–26 – These central chapters contain the proclamation of laws to be observed.
- 3) 26:16-19 – This short passage contains a narrative which witnesses the formal pact of the covenant.
- 4) 27–28 – These chapters contain the rituals related to the covenant as well as the blessings and curses which Moses pronounces over the people.

Von Rad observes that a structure of this type would be consistent with a situation of celebrating a feast in which the covenant is renewed. This would explain several features of the book that otherwise would appear disparate: its organic unity, its combination of parenesis and liturgy, its exhortation to follow the commandments and instruction of the agreement. In addition to Von Rad's breakthrough in the literary organization of the book, Martin Noth made a significant contribution that placed the book of Deuteronomy within a wider scope.

Having accepted de Wette's general remarks as well as Von Rad's literary study, Martin Noth observed a larger organic unity that begins with the book of Deuteronomy and concludes with the second book of Kings. This new organic unity he termed the Deuteronomistic history. This massive work integrated existing works, such as the annals of the Kings, the accounts of Judges, and heroic stories, into a vision of Israel's history spanning from Moses in the land of Moab to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile. The book of Deuteronomy was placed at the beginning of this historical work as a theological base providing the criteria for assessing and judging Israel's history. The book of Deuteronomy then is the cornerstone for understanding the Deuteronomic presentation of Israel's history.

The seminal element in this theology is the innovative understanding of the covenant in redemptive history. This redemptive history holds out hope of conversion and blessings for Israel while at the same time takes into account the unfaithfulness and failure of Israel, which culminated in the exile.

Before its insertion into the larger historical framework of the Deuteronomist, the "Ur-deuteronomium", the original book, would have already existed independently (Deut 4:44–28, excluding 27). On the occasion of the insertion into the historical framework, ch. 1–3 were composed along with parts of ch. 31 (1-13, 24-26) as well as parts of ch. 34. The inserted

sections of ch. 34 are narrative and involve the changing of authority from Moses to Joshua. The body of Deuteronomy inspires these new formulations. At the time of the exile, two sections had been inserted to render the book and its theology readily applicable to the exiles who hoped for redemption. These are sections, 4:1-44 and chs. 29-30. Some of the richest and most explicit elements of the theology of conversion find their expression in the period of the exile.

It was in light of Von Rad's literary breakdown of Deuteronomy as a covenant festival and Korošec's study of Hittite Treatises that an exciting path was taken in Deuteronomistic studies. Scholars began to see the Treaty Formulary, which Korošec uncovered in his work on the Hittite treatises as having provided the literary backdrop for covenant theology in the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is the work that initiated the enormous amount of study on the relationship between covenant and treaty. Bickermann (1951) was the first to draw the comparison between Von Rad's four major literary units of Deut and the treaty formulary of the Ancient Near-East. But it was Mendenhall 5 years later who had systematized the research in his book, *Law and Covenant in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*. Comparison of Korošec's Treaty Formulary and the major units of Von Rad's literary analysis.

## V. Korošec

## Deuteronomy

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>1) titulature:</b>                                | 4:45, these are the testimonies, the orders, the statues which Moses communicated to the sons of Israel. |
| <b>2) prologue:</b>                                  | 4:45–11:32, history is used as a basis for the general commandment to be faithful to the covenant.       |
| <b>3) impositions:</b>                               |  |
| <b>general -</b>                                     | 4:45–11:32, the exhortation to be faithful to the covenant.  |
| <b>particular -</b>                                  | 12–26:5, diverse social and cultic laws which are to regulate Israel's life across the Jordan.           |
| <b>4) invocation of witnesses for oaths:</b>         | 4:26, 30:19 (these are later traditions).  |
| <b>5) blessings and curses:</b>                      | 28:1-68  |
| <b>6) the exchange of oaths and related rituals:</b> | 26:16-19; 27   |
| <b>7) a written testimony:</b>                       | 31:9-13, 24-27   |

In addition to the covenant formulary that can be discerned in the overall structure, the same formulary appears to be the basis for the organization of later additions at the time of the exile:

**Deut 4:1-44;**

- 4:9-14 historical prologue
- 4:15-24 general impositions
- 4:25-31 curses and blessings (notice the inverted order, ordinarily the blessings came first, historical perspective)
- 4:26 invocation of heaven and earth as witnesses

**Deut 29-30;**

- 29:1 situation
- 29:2-9 historical prologue
  
- 29:10-15 clarification of the parties in the covenant
- 29:16-20 fundamental stipulations
- 29:21-28 curses
- 30:1-10 blessings
- 30:11-14 exhortation
- 30:15-19 curses, blessings
- 30:19 witnesses
- 30:19b-20 exhortation

The presence of the treaty formulary in the covenant text of Deuteronomy is the most complete example that we have in the First Testament. Not only does the original book contain an explicit structure of the treaty formulary, but even the subsequent insertions of 4:1-44 and 29-30 make explicit use of the formulary in an exposition of a theology of conversion. McCarthy has postulated that it was precisely the Deuteronomic school of the seventh and sixth centuries that made the explicit use of the treaty formulary in its covenant formulation. The arguments for this thesis are as follows:

1. The vassal treaties described by Korošec were not used exclusively by the Hittites in the 12 c BC. They were in use throughout the Middle East from the 3rd millennium right up till the pre-Hellenistic period, a span of almost 2000 years. This fact counters the argument that the use of the treaty formulary by Israel must have stemmed from the 12 c BC.
2. The structure of the vassal treaty was not rigid, especially when comparing the Hittite and Assyrian treaties. Yet the structure does contain certain essential traits, e.g. the titlature defining the parties, the stipulations, blessings and curses and the oath.
3. Deuteronomy is the only work that undoubtedly follows the treaty formulary. Other covenant formulations do so always with a lesser correspondence (Jos 24, 1Sam 12, Exod 19-24).
4. A literary genre is transmitted in the tradition in its pure form and only gradually does it become adapted and changed. Therefore the first employment of a particular genre is expected to be the purest.

5. All of the foregoing observations suggest a different scheme of the evolution of the treaty formulary in the OT as that first proposed by Mendenhall and Baltzer. The sinaitic covenant in its literary expression was not governed nor expressed by the categories of the treaty formulary. With time, after Israel as a political kingdom had come to know the world of diplomacy, it had attempted to apply some of these elements of the literary genre known as the treaty formulary to its idea of a covenant with God. But only the Deuteronomic school of the 7th century did a successful application of the formulary to the covenant relationship occur.

6. In this way, Deuteronomy is not the last link in the chain, but it is the first complete use of the covenant formulary.

### History of Redaction: Deuteronomy

original Deuteronomy: 4:45 – 11; 12 – 28

1° edition: 1–3 27 31:1-15, 31:24-26

2° edition: 4:1-44 29–30 31:16-23 32–34

Notes regarding the individual units of Deuteronomy:

**1–3** This unit functions as a prologue for the entire Deuteronomic work. It introduces the great theological themes of this historical work and attempts to situate in a larger context the central discourses of Moses. It narrates a history of Israel's sin and fear in response to God's call and blessing.

- the sin of the spies, disobedience, lack of trust
- the wilderness experience is idealized, Israel learns who God is through obedience and trust in the desert.
- disobedience brings ruin, obedience brings success

**4:1-44** This unit is an exhortation to hear and to obey the statutes and the ordinances. A theology of conversion is first articulated here.

**5:1–6:3** This unit serves as a juridical basis for the periodic assemblies of Israel. The assemblies are to gather in order to recount the 10 words of Horeb. The Lord had given to Moses stipulations which only at this time in Moab, Moses is divulging. In this way the Deuteronomists are basing the new teaching of this covenant in the oral traditions of Moses.

**6:4-25** The first homily of Moses concentrates on the principal demand of the covenant which is the first commandment. This call to be faithful to the one God is rooted in Israel's history, vv. 10-11 (future history), vv. 21-23 (past history). This includes the notable "Shema Israel" "Hear O Israel the Lord your God is One".

**7:1-25** The second homily of Moses highlights the call to faithfulness. Faithfulness is the key to the text 1-5, 16, 25-26. The Israelites are to avoid that which would give occasion to apostasy.

**8:1-20** A third homily on the fundamental commandment. Here the quality of humility on the part of Israel is set forth. Israel is to be cognizant of its origins. The treaty formulary in part is reflected in this unit, history 2-5, 14-16, command 1,6, 17-18, curses 19-20. The literary quality of these homilies is of a high standard. Note the concentric structure of this chapter below.

- 9:1-7** A fourth short homily on attitudes of humility. The conquest was not due to Israel's righteousness. On the contrary Israel's history is laced with sin. Victory belongs to the Lord.
- 9:8-10:11** This unit is a long historical account which narrates the breaking of the Horeb covenant with the adoration of the golden calf. Moses had to intercede for Israel and the covenant was renewed.
- 10:12-11:17** The fifth and last homily on the fundamental commandment: fear the LORD, walk in his ways, love him, serve him with your whole heart and your entire soul and keep the commandments. These phrases are repeated throughout the section with motivations that depict God as the Lord of nature and of history. The motivations for adhering to the Lord conclude with blessings and curses 11:13-17.
- 11:18-25** This final section forms a conclusion to the homilies within the context of the narrative . "Lay up all these words of mine in your hearts. Teach them to your children, write them down, that you might live".
- 11:26-32** This short unit joins together chs. 5-11 to the statutes and rites of 12-28
- 11:26-28 = Deut 28, curses  
 11:29-31 = Deut 27, Mt Ebal and Gerizim  
 11:32 = Deut 12-26, the statutes and ordinances
- 12-26** The specific statutes and commands, with parenetic elements. Of note among the laws is the special concern for those among the community who were not protected through land rights; the levites, the poor, the orphan, the widow and the aliens (Deut 14:27-29; 15; 16:11-12, 18-20; 18:1-8; 24:10-22). Precisely in these references of just treatment of the poor, we notice strong exhortative or parenetic language showing God's special care for the weak.
- 26:16-19** a liturgical ceremony of exchanging covenant promises, the oath between the people and God, the classic position is stated: Israel will be God's treasured people and the Lord will be their God.
- 27** this unit changes to a narrative of which Moses is the object in the 3rd person.
- 27:1-8 Moses + elders: steles, write the laws, set them up  
 burnt offerings.
- 27:9-10 Moses + levites: this day you have...
- 27:11-26 Moses charged: the curses of Ebal and Gerizim

This chapter 27 breaks the unity between 26:19 and chapter 28. It expresses an interest in liturgical rites connected to covenant renewal at Shechem. The redactor obviously has understood chs. 5–28 to be a treaty document that presents the history of Israel as a covenant juridically valid. But this covenant is not simply a repetition of the covenant at Sinai, it is a covenant with three moments: Sinai (Deut 5, the decalogue), Moab (5:31; 4:46; 26:16-19), the Promised Land. The ceremony at Shechem is meant to create an intimate connection between people, law and land.

- 28**            Blessing and curses (Assyrian type), the curses invert the blessings and undo the Exodus. They end with the people in Egypt where they are even lower than slaves.
- 29–30**        These chapters contain the covenant formulary, but it presents the covenant in terms of urgency and in terms of interiority.
- 31**            This chapter has Moses introducing the changing of authority from himself to Joshua (Deut 31:1-8); the writing of the law in fulfillment of the covenant (Deut 31:9-13); continuation of Joshua's commissioning (Deut 31:14-15); the Lord instructs Moses to teach a song that will be a witness to the people for their disobedience.
- 32**            The song of Moses = psalm of descriptive praise, captures the basic insight of the Deuteronomists regarding suffering and blessings.
- 33**            The blessing of Moses
- 34**            Narration concerning the death of Moses and Joshua's leadership.



The third homily of Moses, Deuteronomy 8:1-20, is formulated in a concentric (chiastic) and parallel structure:

A Blessing 1 All the commandments which I command you<sup>s</sup> **today** you<sup>pl</sup> shall be careful to do, that you<sup>pl</sup> may live and multiply and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore to give your<sup>pl</sup> ancestors.

B Remember 2 And you<sup>s</sup> shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you<sup>s</sup>

C Desert *these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not, 3 and he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with Manna which you did not know nor did your ancestors know, that he might make you know that humans do not live by bread alone, but that humans live by everything which proceeds from the mouth of God. 4 Your clothing did not wear out upon you, and your foot did not swell these forty years. 5 Know then in **your heart** that, as a man disciplines his son the LORD your God disciplines you. 6 So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and fearing him.*

D the Good Land

F 7 For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valley and hills, 8 a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, 9 a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper, 10 and you shall eat and be full and you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land he has given you.

E Do not forget 11 Take heed lest you forget the LORD your God, by not keeping his commandments, his ordinances and his statutes which I command you **today**:

D' Civilization

F 12 lest when you have eaten and are full and have built goodly houses and live in them, 13 and when your herds and flocks multiply, and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, 14 then **your heart** be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God,

C' Desert *who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, 15 who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, where you brought out water from the flinty rock 16 who fed you in the wilderness with Manna which your ancestors did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. 17 Beware lest you say in **your heart**, "My power and the might of my hand gave me this wealth.*

B' Remember 18 You<sup>s</sup> shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth that he may confirm his covenant which he swore to your<sup>s</sup> ancestors, as at **this day**.

A' Curse 19 And if you<sup>s</sup> forget the LORD your<sup>s</sup> God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you<sup>pl</sup> **today** that you<sup>pl</sup> shall utterly perish. 20 Like the nations the LORD makes to perish before you<sup>pl</sup>, so will you<sup>pl</sup> perish because you<sup>pl</sup> would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.

## **C) THE STRATEGY OF THE DEUTERONOMISTS**

### **C.1) The Theological Synthesis of Deuteronomy**

The unity of the book focuses on the covenant commitment of ch. 26, explained through exhortation in chs. 29–30. The presentation of the theological synthesis occurs in the context of the historical explanation and exhortation of Moses to Israel in the land of Moab before the crossing of the Jordan River. The crossing of the Jordan symbolizes the realization of the promise of life. The crossing is a point of no return, a critical moment of salvation. The Deuteronomists, by choosing this point in time of Israel's history, the immanent moment of the crossing, are highlighting the present moment as an immanent moment of salvation. Since Israel had missed an opportunity for salvation so often in history, Moses, the great authority on liberation, is presented as exhorting Israel, explaining the immanent gifts and tasks awaiting the Israelites upon entering the Promised Land. The Deuteronomists do not want Israel to miss their opportunity for salvation in the exile, a salvation that takes place in the mind and heart and overflows in the concrete living of a just life based on the laws of God.

## C.2) The Structure of Conversion within the Covenant Theology of Deuteronomy

### "COVENANT - BERIT"

Abrahamic - Exodus - Wilderness - Sinai - wilderness - victory - Moab - Jordan - Promised  
Covenant Land

Call

Promise à liberation à commitment à obedience à blessing à conversion à promise  
land à sin à curse redemption land

OATH	CURSE
ISRAEL – GOD	
TORAH	BLESSING

Deuteronomy must be read on a double level. The work is an interpretation of the desert wanderings that converge towards a moment of conversion and commitment in the land of Moab with the crossing of the Jordan . But this particular interpretation of the desert experience did not arise out of the blue. The common opinion is that the final redaction of the book of Deut and indeed of the entire Deuteronomistic history took place during the exile. The theology of these redactors had been inspired by the covenant renewal document found in the temple under Josiah. Essentially it was a theology that was meant to answer the challenging questions of faith that the exile prompted. With the land torn away from Israel, has not their identity also been torn asunder. Has the enterprise of the Exodus, Sinai, and the Kingdom come to an end. Has God finally abandoned Israel to be a nation like all the other nations?

In the presentation of the Moab experience Deut is suggesting that the situation of contemporary Israel in exile is analogous to the desert wanderings of Early Israel. They are outside of the promised land. But salvation is immanent for the exiles, just as the crossing of the Jordan was immanent in the context of Moab. Just as the Israelites in the land of Moab had the extraordinary opportunity to understand the significance of their history in a new way, so too do the exiles have an opportunity to take cognizance of their history. The Deuteronomists interpret the mosaic teaching at Moab as a call to make an interior act of faith and commitment to the social and moral laws identified with the Lord's will. Ultimately it is to the Lord personally that they commit themselves to. For the exiles then, Deut is a call to faith in the One Lord in light of the Lord's love, in light of Israel's profound sin. And the context of the covenant, namely the immanent crossing of the Jordan highlights the intensity, the interiority and the critical opportunity of commitment to the Lord.

Perhaps the essential teaching of Deut can be summarized quite simply: The core of the message is a call to love the Lord with one's whole heart and with one's whole mind, for God has loved Israel and has never abandoned them. This core teaching is infused with several suppositions that of themselves underpin the call to faithfulness. God's love for Israel really is

quite simply irresistible. In light of this love, Israel's sin is equally quite incomprehensible. There is no illusion in Deut of the depth of human blindness and fear. This can only be met by the faithful, loving, powerful Lord. Therefore the strategy of the Deuteronomists is to exhort the exiles to appropriate God's love interiorly through a consideration of the Lord's might acts and deeds of faithfulness. This appropriation is meant to issue in a radical commitment of one's mind and heart to the Lord of Israel. The exiles have had their temple, their priests, their kingdom torn away. The external structures to support and express their faith are gone. But this situation is an extraordinary opportunity and challenge of faith. What is discernible in the exhortations and teachings of Moses in Deut is a theology of redemption, which calls Israel to conversion.

The exhortation to be committed radically to the Lord then is founded on the double presentation of the Lord's love and Israel's unfaithfulness. The constant juxtaposition of these two foundational experiences of Israel is meant to provoke on the part of the Israelites the obvious choice for life.

### **C.3) THE LORD'S LOVE**

The love of God is the unassailable basis for the call to conversion. This love of God toward Israel is testified through a love for the ancestors, the power of God in favour of Israel in the exodus, through the gift of the Torah at Sinai, through the loving care shown to Israel in the wilderness, through the extraordinary gift of the good land, and in the choice that Israel be a special people who belong to the Lord.

#### **a) The love for the ancestors:**

- ▶ 1:8,21 Behold I have set the land before you, go in and take possession of the land which the Lord swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give to them and to their descendants after them.
- ▶ 4:31 For the Lord your God is a merciful God, he will not fail you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors which he swore to them.
- ▶ 4:32-40 Israel's contemplation of the beauty and greatness of their God
- ▶ 7:12 The Lord will keep with you the covenant and steadfast love which he swore to your ancestors to keep. He will love you, bless you and multiply you...

#### **b) The love of God shown in the exodus:**

- ▶ 4:20 But the Lord has taken you and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt to be a people of his own possession as at this day.
- ▶ 5:15 You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

6:20-23, 7:17-19; 11:1-7; 26:5-10

**c) The love of God shown in the wilderness:**

The wilderness is the time when the Lord showed special care and love for Israel. This time is interpreted by the Deuteronomists as a special revelation of the one God, there is no other, because it is interpreted as a land in which survival was impossible, yet the Lord sustained them.

There is no other explanation other than the Lord being Lord of all creation who has chosen Israel. It is also considered a special time for learning, a period of testing to prepare them for the promised land.

- ▶ 1:30-31 The Lord your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the Lord your God bore you as a man bears his son, in all the way of the wilderness until you came to this place.
- ▶ 2:7-8 For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands; he knows your going through this great wilderness, these forty years the Lord your God has been with you, you have lacked nothing. 8:2-20, 29:5-9; 32:6-14

**d) The gift of the land:**

The gift of the land is assured by a past referent - it is promised to the ancestors, but it is the gift in the immanent future. The exodus and the wilderness are the main referents of the past. The gift of the land, though promised in the past, is all the future gifts that the Lord will give. This future is emphasized with such phrases as: "When you enter into the land you will remember", "you will do", etc.

5:31-33, 6:1-3; 8:1; 11:8-15; 12:10-20; 17:14; 21:1

**e) The gift of the Torah:**

Even the special laws and statutes that express the Lord's will for Israel are interpreted as a sign of love and care. The Lord is not like other gods who seem dominated by chance and whim. The Lord's will is not arbitrary but seeks the welfare of his special people through justice.

- ▶ 4:5-8 Behold I have taught you ordinances...
- ▶ 29:9 Therefore be careful to do the words of this covenant that you may prosper in all that you do.

**f) Israel is a special people:**

The Lord out of love alone has chosen Israel to be a special people:

4:20; 4:32-40; 7:6-11; 10:12-22; 28:7-12; 29:12-13; 30:9-10; 32:6-14; 33:3-5

The love of God throughout all of Israel's history is the basis for Israel's hope. The love and faithfulness of God is irresistible if one only considers all that the Lord has done.

**C.4) ISRAEL'S FAITHLESSNESS**

Yet another reality strikes against the irresistible love of God and that is Israel's sin, blindness and disobedience, all of which are based on fear. And this is for the Deuteronomists incomprehensible. Both the Lord's love and Israel's sin together cry out for conversion, a change of heart and a new commitment. There are three general treatments of sin in Deut. a) the paradigm of sin at Sinai, b) the sin near Kadesh Barnea with the spies, and c) finally the sin of forgetting the Lord in the promised land. In all three the depth of sin is highlighted precisely because each act of disobedience was preceded by the love of God.

a) The golden calf, fear in the desert at Sinai:

▶ 9:6-29 There was a history of the disobedience even in the desert.

b) The sin at Kadesh Barnea:

The description of the sin of disobedience at Kadesh Barnea is explained as a fear that distorts their perception of reality.

▶ 1:19-40 fear blinds them into perceiving death in the land where in fact there is life. And they perceive life (the security of Egypt) where in fact there is death (slavery).

▶ 1:41-46 false conversion, there can be no blind obedience to precepts without an inner consent to the value upheld and elicited in the precept. cf. 1Sam 15:17f

c) Sin is deep-rooted:

The Deuteronomists understand that this stubbornness and fear is deep-rooted in Israel. Every generation it seems has to learn anew to trust and overcome fear. In as much as God's love can be described as a rock, always faithful, so too is Israel's sin characterized as deeply rooted. Only a continual confrontation with the memory of God's love does Israel stand a chance of authentic conversion and obedience to the will of the Lord

▶ 8:11 When you enter the land do not forget

▶ 9:4-6,13-29 you are stubborn and the people you defeated were evil.

▶ 31:16-18 The conviction is expressed that sin will occur, and therefore this recognition may be a reminder to allow for the possibility for a renewed conversion. This song is a witness. The realization of the curses is sure. To break the covenant means

disaster and death. That is what one implicitly chooses in breaking the covenant.

- ▶ 31:20-22 They will forget who was the source of their blessing and success.
- ▶ 32:15-18 The rejection of Jeshurun in the song of Moses - a poetic story of redemption.

### **C.5) THE CALL TO CONVERSION**

The strategy of the Deuteronomists is to confront Israel with the reality of God's steadfast love and with their own blindness and disobedience in order to provoke a radical and profound choice for the Lord in the exile. The theology presented in the book is a filter through which to understand the present predicament of the exile. There is to be an interiorization of the Lord's love, through recognition of both past and future blessings. The response of Israel's contemplation of the Lord's steadfast love is to interiorize the Lord's attitude in one's mind and heart. The response to Israel's contemplation of sin is to change one's heart in a radical commitment to the will of the Lord.

The ultimate reason for this emphatic call to interiorize the love of God expressed to the Ancestors, in Exodus, in the gift of the land is to call forth a radical commitment to the ways and words of God. The call to decision is nowhere in the O.T. more emphatically stated. The conditions for this decision are systematically put forward: a) the reality of God's love, power and jealousy, all of which preclude any other possible choice - the God of Israel really is irresistible, b) the reality of Israel's past faithlessness, through fear and through forgetting clearly ends in disaster. Both the love of God and the disasters resulting from sin are systematically unfolded in Deut in order to exhort a conversion. Deut is one extensive exhortation through recalling history and positing the choice for the Lord. The choice is a very real one. In other words, the Deuteronomists realize that a mere cultic observance of the law is not what will unite Israel to the will of the Lord. They call Israel as a whole and each individually to embrace the values inherent in the Lord's will expressed in the Torah.

The call to interiority is the Deuteronomists strategy for mobilizing an effective decision that answers and responds to the Lord's irresistible love and to Israel's incomprehensible sin. A phrase is used as a refrain throughout Deut, which summarizes and crystallized the Deuteronomic call to interiority: "love the Lord your God with your whole heart, mind and soul".

- ▶ 4:29-31 But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and all your soul.
- ▶ 6:4-5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your might (cf. Mark 12:24, Matthew 22:37, Luke 10:27)
- ▶ 10:12-13,20 what does the Lord require of you but to fear the Lord your God to walk in his ways to love him, to serve the Lord your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul.
- ▶ 11:13-14,22; 13:3-4; 26:16; 30:1-3,6,10,20.

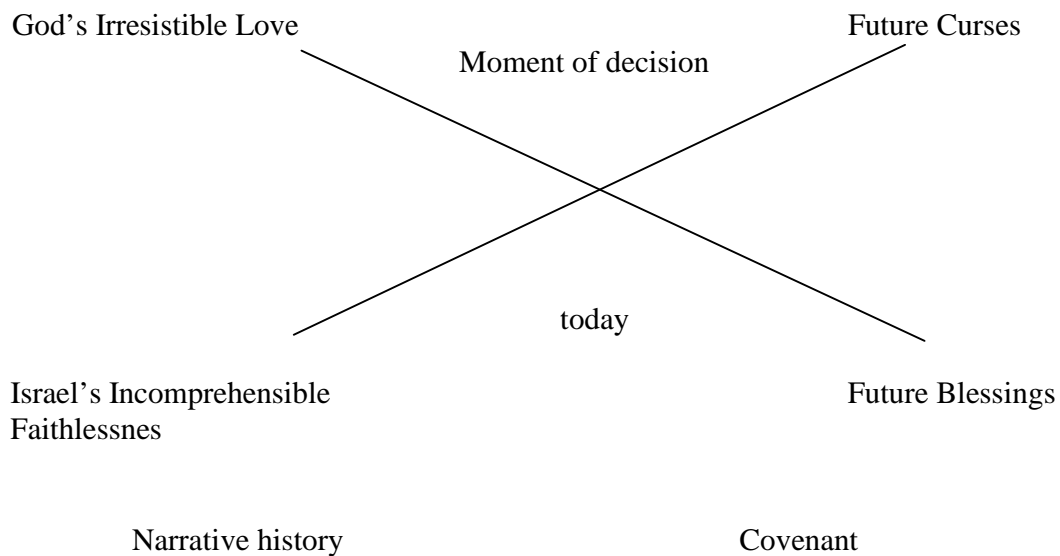
These refrains are counterpointed and strengthened with the phrases that call the Israelites to lay up all the memories of the past in their heart.

4:39, 7:17, 9:4, 10:16=30:6, 11:16, 11:18, 30:14, 32:46-47

**C.6) COVENANT AND CONVERSION**

One of the hallmarks of covenant theology in Deut is the openness of the image of covenant itself to conversion. In no other covenant formulation was the stark reality of Israel's unfaithfulness so integrated into the constitution of the covenant itself. The Abrahamic promises assure land and descendants. The gift is unconditional, as long as one accepts to be a part of the group who is to receive the promise (covenant sign of conversion). The covenant of Sinai is conditional in the sense that the people are to obey the ten words (20:4-6). But no provision is made in the Sinai covenant in the case of the breach of covenant. In fact immediately with the first covenant at Sinai, there is apostasy symbolized in the golden calf. The broken covenant is symbolized in the breaking of the tablets. Moses must return to receive a new version of the agreement. The covenant at Horeb includes something new. This covenant presented in ch 29 is clearly distinguished from the covenant of Sinai with the clarification that the Israelites did not have the eyes nor the mind with which to understand their history and therefore to be able to respond to the covenant at Sinai. This has now changed. The Israelites are to digest their past, both divine blessings and their own hardness of heart, in order to make an interior commitment to their God with their "whole heart, mind and soul". The very blessings and curses that occur in history are interpreted as integral elements of the covenant whose function is to call Israel to conversion.

Both the blessings of land, descendants, rest from one's enemies and the curses, being cut off from the land, being few, scattered to the corners of the earth are meant to call Israel back to remembering their Lord and God, the source of their promise and life. In this way, the tragedies of the exile in Babylon are interpreted as God's calling Israel back to a deeper faithfulness to God's ways. The promise of life is assured even in the midst of tragedies and failure. But the onus is on Israel to respond completely to the blessings and promises achieved in history by God.





## **Prophecy in Israel – the Literary Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel**

Study 1 – How would we characterize prophecy in Israel according to the three vocational texts of Isaiah 6, Jeremiah 1 and Ezekiel 1-3 (consider also Isaiah 49)?

Study 2 – One of the features of prophecy includes oracles of judgement against Israel and the nations. How would you describe and explain the prophets' understanding of what constitutes unfaithfulness to God? Use as a source Isaiah 1– 39, Jeremiah or Ezekiel.

Study 3 – Despite the impending doom that the prophets tend to announce, oracles of hope also find a place in each prophet. How do the three prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel construct images of hope for the people?

### **Reflection Paper**

For a reflection paper, I would like to suggest that you choose one of the Minor Prophets (Amos, Hosea, Joel, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Notice that I have excluded Obadiah for its brevity, Daniel for its affinity to apocalyptic literature and Jonah for its affinity to wisdom literature). Explain the prophet's understanding and presentation of injustice on the part of Israel as well as the particular characteristics of hope in the prophet's oracles.

M. Kolarcik, January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2003

*Selected Bibliography: Note that the two books by Boadt and Ceresko marked by asterisks are fine introductions to the entire Old Testament. They would be adequate for your work on the prophets. But for your reflection paper you may need to find additional material for the particular prophet you choose to study.*

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