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The Message of the Deuteronomic Historian

CARL GRAESSER, JR.

In this study we propose to determine the main outlines of the message which the author(s) of the books of Joshua through Kings intended to speak to the contemporary Israelite people. Following a few introductory comments, the major structural elements utilized by the sacred historian(s) to construct this monumental work will be described. These elements will then be studied for the keys they contain to understanding the message of these books.

Those scholars who discerned the sources J, E, D, and P in the Pentateuch were quick to recognize many characteristics of these sources beyond the Pentateuch in the books of Joshua through Kings, that portion of the Hebrew canon referred to as the Former Prophets. It became standard practice to refer to a Hexateuch composed of the four sources running from Genesis through Joshua.¹ Others found the sources J and E running on

¹ Theologically, of course, a Hexateuch forms a more complete unit than the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch proclaims a promise which remains unfulfilled until the book of Joshua—the gift of the promised land. The very early practice of treating the five books of the Pentateuch as a unit derives from the authority and centrality of the formative historical events and the laws of Moses which they contain and describe.

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into Judges or even into the books of Samuel.² The theology and vocabulary of Deuteronomy are again quite evident in the editorial evaluations in the books of Kings.

In 1943 Martin Noth suggested a major revision of this common view.³ He suggested that the sources J, P, and E are found only in Genesis through Numbers and so speaks of a Tetrateuch. The books of Deuteronomy through Kings therefore form one large historical work compiled by the Deuteronomic historian. This man lived in the time of the exile and sought to interpret the meaning of the history of Israel from Moses to the exile to his countrymen. This historian took Deuteronomy chapters 5 through 30, a unit already in existence, placed Deuteronomy 1 to 4 before it as an introduction to the entire work, and then added the books of Joshua through Kings. The books of Joshua through Kings are his own compilation in which he made extensive use of earlier historical sources available to him. We call him the "Deuteronomic

² So for example Eissfeldt. His book *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), may serve as a compendium of views on the authorship and composition of these books (see especially pp. 241—300). It may be noted that his hypothesis of a "lay" source, L, is his personal viewpoint. It has not gained general acceptance.

³ M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien I* (Schriften der Königsberger Gelehrten Gesellschaft, geisteswiss. Kl., XVIII, 2, Halle-Salle [1943]).

historian" (Dtr)⁴ because his work breathes the spirit and theology contained in the Book of Deuteronomy.

The present article does not propose to defend Noth's theory. This writer counts himself among those who find Noth's theory all too simple and believes that there is a more complicated prehistory to the sources used by the final Deuteronomic historian.⁵ Nor is it the purpose of this article to outline the history of these sources. Rather it proposes to study the final—that is present, canonical—form of the work with the purpose of determining the message it was intended to proclaim in this form. That these books were written, under God, to speak a message rather than to give the bare skeleton of history is already signaled to us by the name given the books of Joshua through Kings in the Hebrew canon, the Former Prophets.

I. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

Though Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings presently comprise four, or rather six, individual books, they are actually parts of one larger whole. This is clear from the fact that they represent one consecutive story of God's dealing with His people from the conquest down to the exile. This unity was recognized already in the Jewish canon where these books comprise a single section, the Former Prophets.

This history did not reach its final completed form until the exile. The last event

⁴ We shall use the abbreviation Dtr for "Deuteronomic historian" in the rest of this essay.

⁵ As one example of such a possible prehistory, see the rather likely view that the books of Kings underwent two major editions as espoused by John Gray, *I and II Kings* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), pp. 11—15.

noted in 2 Kings 25:27-30, the release of Jehoiachin from prison in the 37th year of his exile, can be dated about 651 B.C. But the entirety of these books was not first written at this time. The sacred historian indicates that he used sources and even names them, the *Book of the Acts of Solomon*,⁶ the *Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel*,⁷ the *Chronicles of the Kings of Judah*, and *The Book of Jashar*.⁹ There are also indications that Dtr took over smaller and larger blocks of material which were handed down to him from various periods in Israel's history. For example, Joshua 15:63 states that the Jebusites dwell in Jerusalem "until this day." The original writing of this item must predate David, who first took Jerusalem. Not all of the Book of Joshua predates David, however. Joshua 10:13 speaks of the *Book of Jashar*, which 2 Samuel 1:18 reports includes David's lament over Saul and Jonathan. This item can only be dated to the reign of David at the very earliest. Thus the books of Joshua through Kings include material and documents originally written at various dates from before the time of David down to the exile. It is the final form of Joshua-Kings which will engage our attention, however.

II. THE STRUCTURE OF JOSHUA-KINGS

The first element which structures and interprets the meaning of individual stories in the Deuteronomic history is the framework in the Book of Judges. This well-known framework sets the story of each of

⁶ 1 Kings 11:41.

⁷ 1 Kings 14:19 and 16 times.

⁸ 2 Kings 20:20 and 14 times.

⁹ Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18.

the judges in the cycle of apostasy, punishment, repentance, prayer, and God's compassion, which leads to deliverance and rest in the land. This cycle is first stated in Judg. 2:11 to 3:6 and then serves as the outline of the story of each of the judges. (See for example the story of Othniel, Judg. 3:7-11.) This repetitive cycle structures and interprets the meaning of the various historical events. A careful comparison of parallel passages will indicate that phraseology, concepts, and theological emphasis common in the Book of Deuteronomy lie at the heart of this cyclical framework.¹⁰

An even more obvious structural element is found in the books of Kings. Here Dtr describes the reign of each king of Israel and of Judah according to a very specific pattern. With virtually every king of Israel the pattern occurs as follows:

- A. Synchronism with Judaeen king
- B. Length of reign
- C. Capital
- D. Evaluation
- E. Reference to source: *Chronicles of Kings of Israel*
- F. Burial place and name of next king (sometimes omitted when the dynasty changed)

While there are occasional slight variations from this pattern, usually not without some significance, it can be seen to provide the basic framework. (Compare the history of King Omri [1 Kings 16:23-28] or of Zimri [1 Kings 16:15-22].) While

¹⁰ Compare for example Judg. 2:11 with Deut. 4:25 and 6:3; Judg. 2:12 with Deut. 4:25 and 6:14; Judg. 2:14 with 6:15. S. R. Driver, *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), pp. 99-102, gives an exhaustive listing of "Deuteronomic" language.

Dtr notes pertinent important historical data, it is clear that his major purpose is to evaluate each king. It is significant that every king of the Northern Kingdom is condemned as an evil king because he "walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat and in the sin which he made Israel to sin," namely, the golden calves at Bethel and Dan. While at first glance the basic sin seems to be idolatry, a more careful analysis and a comparison with the basis of the evaluation of the kings of Judah suggest that the real criterion for judging each king is whether or not he faithfully limited his worship to the temple in Jerusalem. Obviously every Northern king would fare poorly by such a standard! Because the command to worship God in "the place which Yahweh your God will choose to make His name dwell,"¹¹ and in that one place alone, is found only in Deuteronomy, the use of this criterion is one of the basic reasons why the author is referred to as a "Deuteronomic historian."

The history of the kings of Judah is ordered and outlined by a similar framework.

- A. Synchronism with Israelite king
- B. Age, length of reign in Jerusalem
- C. Name of queen mother
- D. Evaluation
- E. Reference to source: *Chronicles of Kings of Judah*
- F. Burial
- G. Name of new king

(The history of Asa [1 Kings 15:9-15, 23-24] serves as a convenient example of this structure.)

Here, too, the historian's basic purpose can be recognized in the series of evaluations which he places on the kings of Judah. The criterion by which they are

¹¹ Deut. 12:5, 11, 14; 14:23-25; 16:2, 6; etc.

judged is whether or not they have served Yahweh alone and have worshiped Him in Jerusalem alone. Thus there are only two kings who receive an unconditionally favorable evaluation, Hezekiah and Josiah. Both of these kings led wide-scale reforms aimed at removing all places of worship other than the temple at Jerusalem.¹² Dtr states of both Hezekiah and Josiah that "there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those that were before him" (2 Kings 18:5; 23:25). Other kings received a conditionally good evaluation. Such is the case with King Asa, who purified the worship practices somewhat but allowed the high places to remain (1 Kings 5:11-14). Other kings received a negative evaluation. The reasons given for this evaluation always deal with the improper worship practices which the kings either inaugurated (1 Kings 14:23) or allowed. (2 Kings 16:2-4)

The recurring emphasis on the significance of the high places not only provides a key to understanding the theology of Dtr but also forms an important link with the Book of Deuteronomy, where such worship on high places is proscribed.¹³ Other types of improper worship practices are also mentioned occasionally which are proscribed in Deuteronomy: for example, the burning of sons,¹⁴ the worship of the host of heaven,¹⁵ use of male cult prostitutes,¹⁶ and soothsayers, mediums, and wiz-

¹² 2 Kings 18:4-6 and 2 Kings 23:4-20.

¹³ For example, compare Deut. 12:2-3 and 1 Kings 14:23.

¹⁴ Compare 2 Kings 16:21; 21:6 and Deut. 12:31.

¹⁵ Compare 2 Kings 21:3, 5 and Deut. 17:2-5.

¹⁶ Compare 1 Kings 14:24 and Deut. 23:17.

ards.¹⁷ Amaziah is praised for keeping a regulation (which is quoted) found only in Deuteronomy.¹⁸ King Manasseh occupies a unique place at the bottom of Dtr's list. His sin is so great and the list of faithless worship so long that the blame for the fall of Judah is placed on his shoulders alone. (2 Kings 21:10-15; 23:25-27)

III. SPEECHES

The third major structural element in the Deuteronomic history is the series of speeches or editorial comments at the crucial turning points in Israel's history which explain the significance of these crises and the fateful choice there placed before Israel. Here, perhaps, more than anywhere else the theology and purpose of Dtr becomes explicit. The study of these passages provides another important key to the message of the book. The links in phraseology and theology between these sections and the Book of Deuteronomy are immediately obvious in many cases. More than 50 percent of the speech to Joshua (1:2-9) can be reproduced verbatim from verses in Deuteronomy.¹⁹ On the other hand, a crucial chapter such as 2 Samuel 7 shows only a few touches of Dtr's phraseology.²⁰ But even where phraseology is not strikingly Deuteronomic, the similarity in theological

¹⁷ Compare 2 Kings 21:6; 23:24 and Deut. 18:10-14.

¹⁸ Compare 2 Kings 14:6 and Deut. 24:16.

¹⁹ Compare Joshua 1:2 with Deut. 5:31; 1:3-4 with Deut. 11:24; 1:5 with Deut. 11:26, 31:6; 1:6 with Deut. 31:23; 1:7-8 with Deut. 5:32; 1:9 with Deut. 31:6.

²⁰ Compare 2 Sam. 7:13 with Deut. 12:11; 7:21 with Deut. 8:24; 7:22 with Deut. 4:35; 7:23 with Deut. 4:34, 38.

emphasis between the speeches and Deuteronomy is obvious.²¹

The first speech stands at the fateful moment when the leadership of Moses is transferred to Joshua and states Joshua's task. Joshua 1:5-6 serves as an outline of the Book of Joshua: verse 5 refers to the conquest of the land reported in Joshua 1-12 and verse 6 refers to the steps taken to divide the land in 13-22.

Joshua's farewell address (Joshua 23) discusses Israel's future now that she is in the land of Canaan and the possible destiny which awaits her if she remains faithful to Yahweh or turns after other gods.

Samuel discusses the significance of the shift from the period of the judges to the monarchy in 1 Samuel 12. An even more momentous change, from the weak Saul to the dynasty of David, is discussed in 2 Samuel 7, where Nathan brings Yahweh's promise to David and David responds in prayer. This chapter explains why one dynasty lasted throughout the entire history of the nation in the south whereas northern Israel witnessed many intrigues and dynasties. Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple indicates the purpose and the significance of this important new institution in Israel. (1 Kings 8:12-61)

The next significant moment in the history of Israel was the division of the united monarchy into two kingdoms (1 Kings 11:32-37). The prophet explains that the Northern Kingdom has been taken away

²¹ This theology centers in an unswerving, total allegiance to Yahweh and His covenant statutes and ordinances, in contrast to following after Canaanite gods and idols and acting according to all the abominations of the Canaanite nations which Yahweh drove out. Compare for example Deut. 6 and 7 with Joshua 23 and 2 Kings 17.

from the Davidic dynasty because Solomon had been faithless. One tribe is retained, however, because Yahweh is faithful to his promise to David. In 2 Kings 17 Dtr himself explains why the Northern Kingdom fell and was taken into exile never to return: it had sinned against Yahweh by worshiping the gods of the nations. Finally Dtr explains why Judah went into exile. It was Manasseh who caused Judah's fall. (2 Kings 21:10-15)

From our vantage point it might seem strange that there is no epilogue at the end of 2 Kings 25 in which the historian indicates how all of this history had a meaning for his contemporaries "this day." Perhaps Dtr felt that his message was clear enough already in the course of the history he had reported and the comments he had made upon it. Perhaps he purposely concluded his work in an open-ended manner that would arouse curiosity and stimulate thought, just as the author of the Book of Jonah did, for example.

In addition to these larger speeches or comments, Dtr occasionally inserts shorter editorial comments. For example, when Israel broke away from Rehoboam, Dtr comments, "The king did not hearken to the people; for it was a turn of affairs brought about by the Lord that he might fulfill His word which the Lord had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat" (1 Kings 12:15).²² In this connection it should be noted also that in the books of Samuel, the marks and comments of Dtr are scarce. We may assume that here he used earlier sources with few additions since they were adequate enough as they stood for his purposes.

²² Compare also 1 Kings 21:25-26 and 2 Kings 14:6.

Thus a certain unity of conception and theological emphasis in the books of Joshua through Kings becomes evident. While this unity of conception and theology probably is not simply the work of one man but of a series of sacred authors—and indeed of a whole group or school—the continuities among the books outweigh the discontinuities. It is better to consider them a unity than merely a collection of four books dealing with successive periods in the history of Israel.

IV. THE MESSAGE OF THE PROPHETIC HISTORIAN

This discussion of the methods of the Dtr(s) prepares the way for asking the more basic question: What is the message which the prophetic historian wished to speak? Just where will one look for this message? First of all, the interest and message of the historian can be seen in the choice of historical events which he has related and handed on. But since Dtr has set these events within a framework and has placed speeches and his own comments at the crucial turning points within their history, the clearest guide to the message of the prophetic historian is precisely this framework and his own comments. They interpret and explain the significance of the historical events which he has handed down to us. Therefore this process of seeking out the framework and the editorial comments of the author is not simply antiquarian study. It is vital and necessary for discovering the message of this sacred book.

The Historian's Purpose

It has long been recognized that the sacred author did not intend simply to give facts or a political history of the sort that

might interest modern historians. The classic example here is the history of Omri. That he was a highly important king cannot be doubted, for he founded the most important and successful dynasty in the north, gave the country a new capital which served it to the end of its days, and gave his own name to the kingdom in the Assyrian sources, namely, the "House of Omri," which was still used when Samaria fell long after his death.²³ Yet Dtr devotes only six verses to him, and all but two of these are consumed by the formula framework. Zimri, who ruled but 7 days, not only receives the same amount of space, six verses, but receives the same overall judgment and evaluation as does Omri—evil! Clearly Dtr's purpose is something other than simply political history. Perhaps we may call it "prophetic history," for his purpose is to interpret the past history of Israel and to speak a message from God to his hearers.

To understand just what this message was, it is helpful to remember the situation and needs of the people of Judah in exile. A genuine crisis faced them. This crisis may be stated conveniently in a series of four questions. First of all, did not the fact that Israel was in exile prove that the Babylonian god Marduk was really in control of history rather than Yahweh? Second, if Yahweh really was in control, then why was His people Israel in exile outside the promised land? Third, if Israel was guilty, was there any hope that the covenant might be reinstated? Or had

²³ It is still used 150 years later at the time of the fall of Samaria in the Annals of Sargon. James Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 2d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 285, col. a.

Yahweh cast Israel off forever? And finally, if there was any sort of help, then what was the proper mode of action and religious response for Israel in exile? Most of the old religious institutions were gone. There was no temple and therefore there could be no sacrifice, nor could the priesthood function as usual. Nor was there a king to serve as representative of God. How could Israel approach Yahweh in worship now?

Prophetic Word Effective in History

To this situation Dtr speaks his message. Underlying his whole historical report is the basic understanding of history as the story of the creative Word of God. Repeatedly Dtr reports that this or that prophet is sent with a certain announcement. But this Word of God spoken by the prophet is not merely a bare announcement. It is God's power flung into the mainstream of human events, effectively setting into motion and accomplishing that which it announces. As Von Rad puts it, "The prophets changed the gears of history with a Word of God."²⁴ This understanding of history can be seen in a whole series of passages in which the prophetic announcement and the historical accomplishment of that announcement are pointed out.²⁵ For example, in 1 Kings 14:6 ff. Ahijah announces that Yahweh will cut off the dynasty of Jeroboam. In 1 Kings 15:29 the demise of that dynasty is noted with the added comment that it happened "ac-

ording to the word of the Lord which He spoke by His servant Ahijah the Shilonite." 1 Kings 8:24 sums it up nicely: "Thou didst speak with Thy mouth, and with Thy hand hast fulfilled it this day." In this grand anthropomorphism the mouth of God indicates the prophet and the hand of God symbolizes His power active in history. This is the historian's answer to the question "Is Yahweh really Lord of history?"

Israel in Exile

Dtr carefully lays the groundwork for his answer to the second question, Why is Israel in exile? He makes very clear just what the purpose and condition of Israel's existence was, both in the framework of his writing and in the speeches contained in Joshua-Kings. His understanding of Israel's purpose and condition of existence is that expressed already in Deuteronomy and summarized in Deut. 28:9: "The Lord will establish you as a people wholly to Himself as He has sworn to you if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God and walk in His ways." Again and again this note is struck in the speeches. Israel is chosen to be Yahweh's sacred people but will remain under His blessing hand only if they show faithful, single-hearted devotion to Yahweh. To this end they are urged to meditate upon the book of the law (Joshua 1:8) and are urged by the prophets to turn to Yahweh and keep His commandments (2 Kings 17:13).²⁶

The historian has thus made it abundantly evident why Israel is in exile. She has been unfaithful. In fact the whole Deuteronomic history is "a comprehensive con-

²⁴ *Old Testament Theology*, I, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 342.

²⁵ Von Rad lists these pairs of passages in *Studies in Deuteronomy*, No. 9 in *Studies in Biblical Theology*, trans. David Stalker (London: SCM Press, 1953), pp. 78—81.

²⁶ See also Joshua 23:6; 1 Sam. 12:12-14; 1 Kings 11:38.

fession of Israel's guilt."²⁷ This is seen already in virtually every judgment which comes upon Israel in the Book of Judges.²⁸ Punishment comes when Israel is unfaithful to Yahweh and serves Baal. Similarly the cause of the exile of both Israel and of Judah is explicitly described as apostasy from Yahweh and service of other gods.²⁹

Israel is in exile because of the power of the covenant curses which she called upon herself. Punishment for failure to keep the covenant is emphasized in Deuteronomy, especially in Deut. 27 and 28.³⁰ The covenant curse of exile and loss of the promised land is alluded to again and again in the Deuteronomic history.³¹ This history thus absolves Yahweh of any blame for this punishment of Israel. It rather praises Him for being faithful to His word and so is quite fittingly called a "doxology of judgment" by Von Rad.³²

Some might object and theorize that Israel's exile was only a chance event. If Judah has really been faithless for the 300 years since Solomon, why did judgment not come sooner? If the word of curse is truly powerful, why did the judgment not come immediately as in the generations of the judges? To this objection Dtr has an answer. There is not only a word of judgment active in history, but there is a counterpower, the word of Yahweh's promise.³³ Judgment has been mollified and postponed

by this word of promise. Yahweh had promised David that he would always have a son upon the throne, and again and again the historian emphasizes that faithless Judah was not destroyed nor was the kingdom taken from the Davidic dynasty completely because of this promise: "That David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put my name" (1 Kings 11:36).³⁴ There is both a word of judgment and a word of promise effective in history, or to use Lutheran terminology, both Law and Gospel.

Exhortation to Action

How then should Israel in exile respond and act toward Yahweh in the light of His past action toward them? The historian urges them to pray and repent.³⁵ First he urges this indirectly by the examples of their forefathers. His hearers who realized that they were in exile because they had not been faithful to Yahweh would not miss the point when the historian reminded them that in the days of the judges faithless Israel was handed over to the oppression of foreign nations. "But when the people of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who delivered them" (Judg. 3:9). Their proper response is, of course, also to pray and cry to God for mercy and rescue. Solomon (1 Kings 8:28-30, 48-52) prays that in the future Yahweh will hear the prayer of those who direct their prayer

²⁷ Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, I, 336.

²⁸ Judg. 2:11-13 et passim.

²⁹ 2 Kings 17:14-18 and 22:10-14.

³⁰ See also 4:25-26; 6:14-15; 8:11-20, etc.

³¹ Deut. 4:27; 28:64; Joshua 23:15-16; 1 Sam. 12:25; 1 Kings 9:7.

³² *Old Testament Theology*, I, 343.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ See also 1 Kings 8:25; 9:5; 11:12-13; 15:4; 2 Kings 8:19; 19:34; 20:6; 25:27-30!

³⁵ This and the next section are heavily indebted to the perceptive essay of Hans Walter Wolff, "Das Kerygma des deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerks," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, LXXI (1961), 171 to 186.

toward the temple from whatever land or exile they may be in. It is noteworthy, too, that after Samuel's farewell speech when the people were fearful and repentant they called upon Samuel to pray in their stead. (1 Sam. 12:19)

Israel is not only to cry out to Yahweh, but she is to repent, literally, "to turn" to Yahweh. Time and again Israel is urged by Samuel and by the prophets to repent (1 Sam. 7:3 and 2 Kings 17:13). Solomon prays that when Israel prays towards the temple and repents after a calamity, Yahweh will hear and forgive them (1 Kings 8:35-36). Josiah is praised as the greatest of kings because he repents. "Before him there was no king like him who *turned* to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him" (2 Kings 23:25). These admonitions by example would surely not be missed by the exiles.

The prophetic historian also urges his hearers to repent and cry more directly to the Lord for mercy. Solomon prays that Yahweh would grant that should his people ever be in exile

if they will repent with all their mind and all their heart in the land of their enemies . . . and pray to Thee toward their land . . . and the house which I have built for Thy name, then hear Thou in heaven, Thy dwelling place, their prayer and their supplication and maintain their cause and forgive thy people . . . and grant them compassion. (1 Kings 8:48-50)

Deut. 4:29-31 is virtually a prediction that Israel in exile will repent and obey the Lord's voice and thus know a merciful God once again. This same sort of prediction of repentance is found again in Deut. 30:2, 10.

Wolff³⁶ notes that these passages suggest that this repentance is Yahweh's gift more than Israel's act. This is shown by the fact that though Israel did not repent at the message of the earlier prophets, she will now turn to Yahweh because He has chastened her by judgments (Deut. 4:30; 30:2). Furthermore, the decisive role of Yahweh in this act of repentance is suggested when these passages do not urge repentance so much as they simply predict it and then add the explanation, "for Yahweh, your God, is a merciful God; He will not fail you . . . or forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to you." (Deut. 4:31)

This repentance is to lead to prayer and to a renewed obedience to Yahweh. Just as their forefathers once set aside foreign gods³⁷ as they turned and followed the commandments of Moses,³⁸ so now they are to "return and obey his voice in all that Yahweh commanded you this day, with all your heart and with all your soul."³⁹

Hope for the Future

Finally we must ask what hope it was that the sacred historian held before the exiles. Von Rad⁴⁰ discovers a veiled promise in the constant references to God's promise of mercy to David "that David My servant may always have a lamp before Me in Jerusalem, the city where I have chosen to put My name" (1 Kings 11:36). The present status of this promise is never explained. This seems to imply that there is yet to be a future to this promise, a new

³⁶ Op. cit. p. 184.

³⁷ 1 Sam. 7:3 and 2 Kings 23:24.

³⁸ 2 Kings 17:13 and 23:25.

³⁹ Deut. 30:2. Compare Deut. 4:30.

⁴⁰ *Old Testament Theology*, I, 343.

David. Furthermore, there is but one event noted from the exile, the release of King Jehoiachin in exile (2 Kings 25:27-30). Surely it is significant that the work ends on this hopeful note with the release of the Davidic king.

About a return from exile, however, little is stated directly. In his prayer Solomon only asks that Yahweh would grant repentant exiles compassion in the sight of their captors (1 Kings 8:50). Similarly Deut. 1:45-46 hints that the exile may last quite a long time even for a repentant nation. When Israel repented in the wilderness, the Lord did not immediately bring them to the promised land but made them wander many years. It is predicted however in Deut. 4:29 that a repentant people will find a merciful God who will not fail them or destroy them or forget His covenant. Yet only in Deut. 30:4-5 and 9 is a return from exile specifically mentioned, and there it is stated that Yahweh will bring them back and bless them richly.⁴¹

⁴¹ Wolff, p. 185.

Why does the historian not paint a more specific glorious picture of the future that he may all the more effectively encourage his hearers to repent? The details of God's blessing in the future are often more vague than our detailed understanding of past history even in the prophets. God's grace is sure, but the precise form it will take is not always clearly nor uniformly spelled out. His people are called to live by faith rather than by sight.

This is how we may understand Deut. 29:29: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all of the words of this law." The future may be mysterious, but it is secure enough because it is in God's hands. In the meantime Dtr describes the proper response of the people clearly. They are to live with the assurance of God's blessing and care as they repent and pray and put their faith in His promises of mercy and forgiveness.

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