

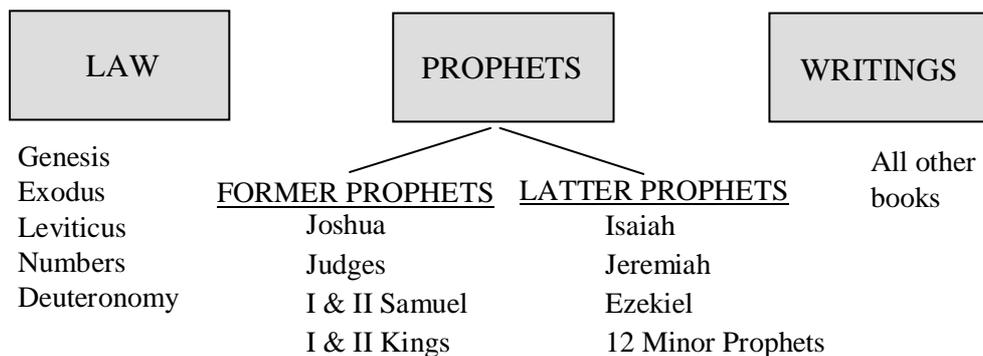
SESSION TWENTY – FOUR

THE DEUTERONOMISTIC THEORY

I. INTRODUCTION

The Hebrew Bible is divided into three major sections: the law, the prophets, and the writings. The second of these (the prophets) is further divided into two parts: the former prophets and the latter prophets. The former prophets includes the books of Joshua, Judges, I & II Samuel and I & II Kings (although the two books of Samuel were originally one in the Hebrew Bible, as were Kings).

ORGANIZATION OF THE HEBREW BIBLE



Although these six books are called "prophets," we normally think of them as *historical books*. The label "prophets," however, reminds us that they are primarily theological in nature rather than annalistic. In fact, Old Testament scholars have noted that these six books, along with Deuteronomy, reflect a unified consistent view of Israel's history. Although they reportedly come from the hand of several authors, they have all the appearance of being an historical account from one author. That is, numerous themes set forth in the book of Deuteronomy are carefully developed and elaborated throughout the material in Joshua through Kings. This would include, among other things, the theme of progressive curses upon Israel for covenant unfaithfulness leading up to foreign invasion and exile from the land of promise.

The books Joshua—Kings could be said to reflect a *fulfillment* aspect of Deuteronomy. Israel's future in the land of Canaan is so accurately described in Deuteronomy (and subsequently unfolded in Joshua—Kings) that critical scholars have come to the conclusion that Deuteronomy is not prophetic (written beforehand) but rather that all the material (Deut—Kings) is a record from after the fact. Conservative scholars, on the other hand, hold the view that Deuteronomy was authored by Moses through divine inspiration (Deut 1:1,5; 31:9,24-26; 32:44), and that Joshua—Kings is a faithful record of the outworking of these anticipations. Critical scholars, however, have taken the position that all this material was written (or reworked) shortly before and during the Babylonian exile by a common

redactor(s).¹ In general, this assumed redactor is referred to as the "deuteronomistic historian." This theory is so prevalent in current scholarship that the evangelical student (who holds to the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture) must be aware of this trend and the dangerous presuppositions on which it rests. The theory of the "deuteronomistic historian" not only denies the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy, but is based on an anti-supernatural approach to the Scriptures (i.e., a denial that God could prophetically anticipate and foretell Israel's future and covenant unfaithfulness).

II. RELATIONSHIP TO OLD TESTAMENT SOURCE ANALYSIS

Exponents of the documentary hypothesis (see notes, "Source Analysis of the OT") have typically dated Deuteronomy late, usually from the period of Josiah (r. 640-609 BC). This is often connected to the discovery of "the law" in Josiah's day. During a repair of the Temple ordered by Josiah, a copy of "the law" was found. II Kgs 22:8 tells us, "*Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, 'I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD.'*" Vs. 10 continues, "*Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, 'Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.' And Shaphan read it in the presence of the king.*" This discovery further accelerated the reform efforts that had been initiated by the king.

Critical scholars suggest that the book found in Josiah's day was the book of Deuteronomy (though they deny that it was authored by Moses or even written in the early part of Israel's history).² Wellhausen, for example,

was convinced that Josiah's reforms were sparked by contemporary religious leaders who, in order to advance these reforms, composed 'the book of the Law' and buried it in the temple. Subsequently, it was 'discovered,' and, since it purported to date from the time of Moses, gave great support to the reforms.³

According to this theory, Deuteronomy was written in Josiah's day, but made to appear as written by Moses so as to give it more authority.⁴ Thus, Deuteronomy and the historical works related to it are really literary products composed for fostering the reform movement of Josiah's day. This was supposedly politically and theologically motivated, namely, to give more authority and backing to the priesthood and the centralization of the worship cult at Jerusalem. Anderson is representative of those who take this position:

Although the author of Deuteronomy remains anonymous, as is true of so much of Old Testament literature, placing the address in the mouth of Moses is not a complete literary fiction. For Deuteronomy is essentially a revival of Mosaic teaching as it was understood in the seventh century B.C.E. To be sure, it does not contain the verbatim utterances of Moses; but the atmosphere is that of the Mosaic faith, though charged with the religious and ethical insights of

¹A "redactor" was a person who reworked previous documents. He was not simply one who did some minor editing or touch-up for publication. Rather, a redactor was one who took literary units of previous generations, interpreted it from his own historical perspective, and recompiled it in such a way to make it relevant (contemporizing) to his own generation.

²Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd from the 3rd German ed. (NY: Harper & Row, 1965), 220. For a rationale as to why "the law" found in the Temple is thought to be the book of Deuteronomy, see Bernard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 4th ed. (NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986), 375.

³William S. La Sor, et al., *Old Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 177.

⁴Though Deuteronomy is regarded as a product of Josiah's day, some critical scholars believe that the nucleus of Deuteronomy (particularly Deut 12—26, 28) has a long history behind it.

the prophetic movement. Like the prophets themselves, the Deuteronomic Torah does not pretend to lead Israel forward to new heights of religious development, but to recall the people to the original faith of the Mosaic period. This is a program of reform, not innovation. Hence the address appropriately is ascribed to Moses.⁵

Once Deuteronomy became disassociated from the Pentateuch, scholars began noticing the commonalities with Joshua—Kings and began to speak of the "Deuteronomic history." More accurately, we should distinguish the adjectives "Deuteronomic" and "Deuteronomistic"⁶:

Deuteronomic - refers to the material found in the core of the book of Deuteronomy (Deut 5—28)

Deuteronomistic - refers to the writings, influenced by the Deuteronomic torah, that comprise the so-called Deuteronomistic History that extends from Joshua through II Kings.

Up until the early part of the twentieth century, critical scholars focused on the task of attempting to analyze the various sources behind the text (as was done with the rest of the Pentateuch).⁷ For Deuteronomy and the historical books, however, scholarly study underwent a shift in focus. Without giving up the notion of sources, critical scholars began to look at this material from a different perspective, namely, that small independent literary units were woven together by an editor or series of editors with a predetermined theological agenda in mind. In 1943, the German scholar Martin Noth defended this theory in detail.⁸ He maintained that Deut—Kings was a unified work written substantially during the exilic period, which he termed "the Deuteronomistic History." For Noth, the purpose of this material was to show how the theology of Deuteronomy was reflected in the history of Israel, and in particular how the material served as a theodicy written to provide the theological rationale for the fall of the northern kingdom, Jerusalem, and Judah.

Not surprisingly, there are various theories as to when and how the Deuteronomistic History was composed, and whether or not there were one or several redactors involved. Noth's suggestion of a single historian responsible for the entire work has been all but given up today. However, there is common agreement among critical scholars that the code of Deuteronomy (especially with its emphasis upon a central sanctuary) served as the basis of Josiah's reforms. Heater helps explain their reasoning:

Since Deuteronomy (chaps. 12, 14, and 16 in particular) seems to limit all worship to one locale, and since the actual practice of worship from the judges to Josiah was in several places, most of the book of Deuteronomy must have been composed in the time of Josiah to

⁵Anderson, 379.

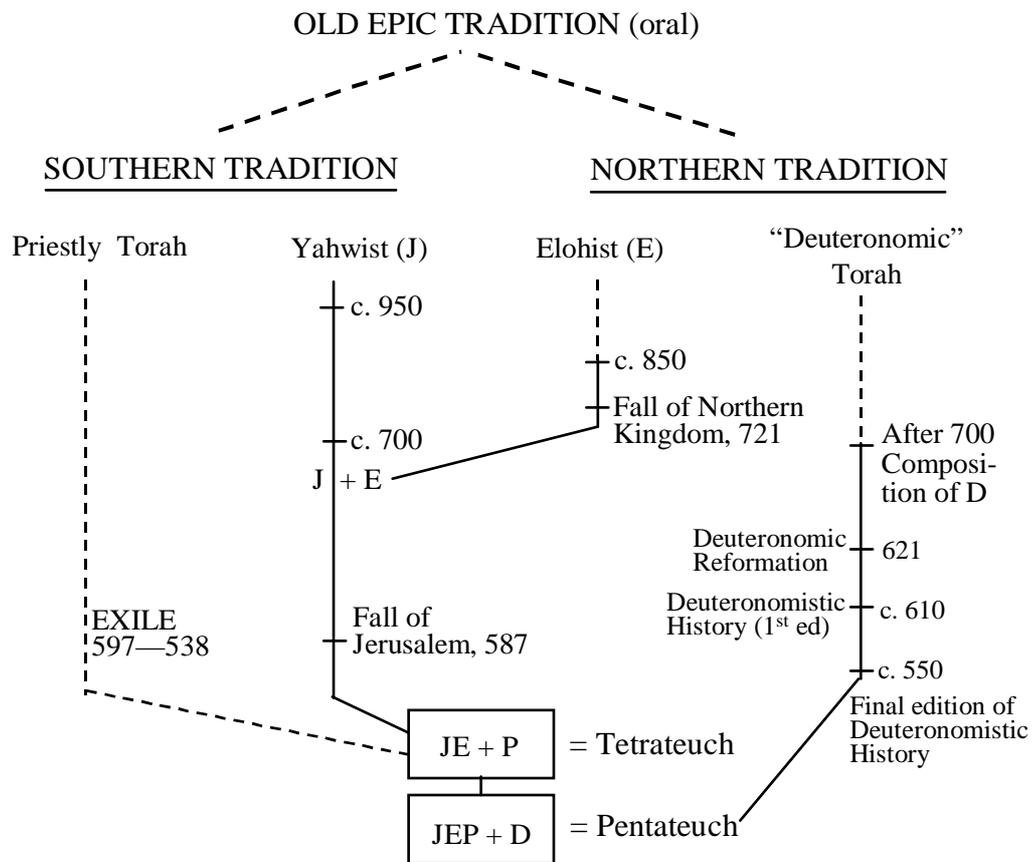
⁶Anderson, 183. It should be noted, however, that these terms are not consistently applied in the same way. Boling, for example, uses the term *Deuteronomic* to refer to a seventh-century historical work containing the bulk of Deuteronomy through II Kings, and the term *Deuteronomistic* to refer to the sixth century updating that provided the final edition (Robert G. Boling, *Judges*, The Anchor Bible [Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975], 31).

⁷For example, see S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, rev. ed. (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912).

⁸Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (reprint; Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1981). For a helpful exposé of Noth and a discussion of redactional history in regard to the books of Samuel, see Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *ISBE* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979-1988), s.v. "Samuel, Books of," by Ralph W. Klein. [see especially section V on Redactional History, 4:316-318].

authenticate a new tradition and to authorize the Josianic reform.⁹

Hence, they speak of the Deuteronomistic Reformation. They would then suggest that subsequently, historians (who took the theological convictions of the Deuteronomistic Reformation seriously) produced a comprehensive "Deuteronomistic" history of Israel from the Mosaic period to the final fall of the nation (i.e., Deut—Kings).¹⁰ A common suggestion is that the final redaction was completed about 550 BC. In this final edition, the *Deuteronomistic history* was expanded and updated to include the destruction and deportation, though ending on the hopeful note of the release of the Davidic King Jehoiachin from a Babylonian prison. Also, the demise of Judah is attributed primarily to the wicked reign of King Manasseh from the first half of the 7th century BC. Anderson's theory (p 453) is:



*In the above chart the broken lines signify oral tradition, and solid lines signify the transmission of the tradition in written form. Notice that all the traditions are parallel developments out of the ancient period, although each was subject to a special development in the circle that preserved it. Like several streams flowing into one river, these traditions were joined and unified in a Priestly edition, thus forming the Pentateuch.

⁹Homer Heater, Jr., "A Theology of Samuel and Kings," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 125.

¹⁰Anderson, 376.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DEUTERONOMISTIC VIEWPOINT

The most prevalent characteristic of these books is the prophetic view of history in which cause and effect are tied to the blessings and curses of the covenant. Walton offers a helpful summary:

The Deuteronomistic History shares with the book of Deuteronomy a common perspective on history and theology. Israel's history is viewed in terms of her loyalty to the covenant. Obedience to the law and faith in the Lord bring the blessings and prosperity of the covenant (Deut. 28), while disobedience and apostasy bring the curses listed there. Dependence on formulaic phrases (e.g., "the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord" in Judges; "walked in the ways of Jeroboam" as the common indictment of the northern kings in the book of Kings) and the rhetorical use of speeches to recapitulate at important junctures (cf. Deut. 4; Josh. 23; Judg. 2:11-23; 1 Sam. 12; 2 Sam. 7; 1 Kings 8: 2 Kings 17:7-23) are among the stylistic similarities.¹¹

In addition to the theology of Israel's covenant unfaithfulness, other themes within Deuteronomy are significant to the whole theory. This includes:

- 1) the centrality of the worship system (Deut 12:5,10-11; cf. 16:16-17)
- 2) a divinely appointed king (Deut 17:14-15)
- 3) removal of false prophets (Deut 13:3,5; cf. Deut 18)
- 4) elevation of the Levitical priests (Deut 18:1-2)
- 5) anticipation of prophets to speak for God (Deut 18:15, 18-19)

The Deuteronomistic tendency within I & II Kings is to evaluate each king in regard to covenant faithfulness. For the northern kings, they are evaluated in comparison to Jeroboam (the first king of the north). For the southern kings, they are evaluated in comparison to David (on whom God bestowed the Davidic covenant). At each point, the author/editor is trying to establish the map of Israel's path to failure. Walton writes,

The so-called exilic edition is thought to be more concerned to develop the theme of sin and punishment. In pursuit of the answer to the exiles' question "Where did things go wrong?" the suggestion is made that things went wrong right from the start and that the pattern continued virtually unabated throughout the long history of the monarchy. The constant presence of the prophetic word to kings during this period confirmed that the Lord gave plenty of warning and ample opportunity to respond. God's patience and faithfulness to the covenant were totally vindicated. It can be seen, then, that the message of these books was tied closely to the covenant.¹²

IV. EVALUATION

There is a vital connection between the book of Deuteronomy and the historical narrative of Joshua—Kings, and in some ways the critical scholars with their theory of the *Deuteronomistic Historian* have prompted us to see this more clearly. This is particularly true in regard to the outworking of Deuteronomy 28—29, in which curses are given in response to covenant unfaithfulness. The climactic curse upon the nation is the judgment of exile from the land.

¹¹Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1991), 156.

¹²Ibid.

The author of Deuteronomy certainly writes about the nation going into exile, but how was he able to know this? Critical scholars would reply that only a person living at the time of exile would know that this was the nation's destiny, and thereby be able to write about it. Conservative evangelicals, however, hold that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Therefore, God (who sees the future of the nation) could write through the hand of Moses in 1406 BC that the nation would eventually be exiled. Hence, this was prophetically foretold! Critical scholars would deny this, however, and assert that this material (including Deuteronomy) was written in retrospect, at least in the final redaction. This theory must be carefully evaluated.

1. The theory of the *Deuteronomistic Historian* suffers from its initial presupposition. It approaches the Bible from a humanistic viewpoint, denying the legitimacy of supernatural prophecy. It assumes that God (who is not bound by the natural order of this universe) has not supernaturally revealed aspects of the future to the human authors of the Bible. Hence, this theory is anti-supernaturalistic.
2. This theory denies the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy, despite the direct statements in the book that attribute it to Moses (Deut 1:1,5; 31:9,24-26; 32:44).
3. This theory overlooks the substantial evidence that Deuteronomy is characteristically similar to 2nd millennium BC Hittite treaty forms, an observation that makes it quite unlikely that Deuteronomy "evolved" through redaction in the 6th-8th centuries BC.¹³
4. This theory leads to a questioning of the theology contained in Deuteronomy. Anderson, for example, writes:

One of the greatest defects of Deuteronomistic theology was that it oversimplified the ways of God in history. The Deuteronomistic doctrine of divine justice makes things too neat: obey Yahweh and all will go well; disobey and hardship will come. It may be that the original version of Deuteronomy understood this truth more profoundly, but as it was worked out by the writer who left us the Deuteronomistic History, it sounds suspiciously like the "success philosophy" which even today is the basis of much popular religion.¹⁴

But who is man to question God's Word and the theology of it?

5. Proponents of this theory claim that even the book of Judges was subject to final redaction in the exilic period, but this is unlikely in light of the internal evidence of the book. For example, the statement in Jud 1:21 "*to this day the Jebusites live there*" must reflect a time prior to David's conquest of Jerusalem (ca. 1004 BC). Cf. 2 Sam 5:6-7. Also, the reference to the Canaanites in Gezer suggests a date before the time the Egyptians gave that city to Solomon's Egyptian wife as a wedding present (cf. 1 Kgs 9:16).
6. According to the theory of the *Deuteronomistic Historian*, the Deuteronomic reformation of Josiah's day and following was highly concerned with the centralization of the worship cult at Jerusalem. Therefore, we would expect this viewpoint to be maintained throughout the books Joshua—Kings. In the book of Judges, however, there is not even a hint of denunciation of the local altars, though there was ample opportunity for it. Segal further points out that

¹³See G. E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955); M. G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1963); and K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Chicago: InterVarsity, 1966), 90-102.

¹⁴B.W. Anderson, 385.

Deuteronomy does not insist that worship be conducted in one place only but that the place must be divinely sanctioned as a holy place for the worship of Yahweh.¹⁵

V. CONCLUSION

The theory of the *Deuteronomistic Historian* is a view propagated by men who do not believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. It denies predictive prophecy, and therefore robs God of His glory. The Bible presents the truth that God knows the future and was able to reveal that in advance to the human authors of Scripture (including the exile of the nation hundreds of year beforehand). One should be aware of this teaching, however, since so much of Old Testament scholarship assumes this theory. But one should be aware, so as not to be naively duped into believing this false theory.

¹⁵Moses H. Segal, *The Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 87-88.