

Joshua and Judges – Session Two Moses and the Deuteronomist



Moses and the Ten Commandments

The Deuteronomist Joshua – An Introduction – Part II Route of the Exodus

The Deuteronomist

The Deuteronomist is the “implied author” of this work [Deuteronomy through 2 Kings]. The Deuteronomistic theme of conditional hope is inextricably woven into the programmatic introduction to the Deuteronomistic History, the Book of Deuteronomy.

If . . . we assume that many gaps, dislocations, and reversals in the biblical text may profitably be viewed as the result of the use (authorial or editorial) of several different viewpoints within the narrative, then, whether the present text is the product either of a single mind or of a long and complicated editorial process, we are still responsible for making sense of the present text by assuming that the present text, in more cases than previously realized, does make sense. A particular biblical passage “makes sense” if it repeats compositional patterns already encountered in what precedes it and foreshadows perspectives that lie ahead.

The Deuteronomist is telling us in Deuteronomy, “Here is what God has prophesied concerning Israel,” but in Joshua – 2 Kings, “This is how God’s word has been exactly fulfilled in Israel’s history from settlement to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile.”

Deuteronomy

The immediate hero of the book is Moses as the spokesman of God. The only other person who is quoted by the narrator is God. Thus, there are only two direct voices which the narrator asks us to attend to in the book: Moses' and God's.

Deuteronomy may be described therefore as the speech of the Deuteronomic narrator in which he directly quotes only two figures in the story, predominantly Moses and sometimes God.

One of the immediate results of this exceedingly complex network of utterances within utterances is the deliberate representation in Deuteronomy of a vast number of intersecting statements, sometimes in agreement with one another, sometimes interfering with one another. This enables the book to be the repository of a plurality of viewpoints, all working together to achieve an effect on the reader that is multidimensional.

The narrator alone can tell us what Moses says that God says to the reader of the book. The reporting context of Deuteronomy comprises only about fifty-six verses. The remainder of the book is composed of utterances of various individuals, mostly Moses, reported in direct discourse. The most obvious functions of the narrator's words are that they situate the words of Moses in time and space, and that they define the preeminent position Moses held as leader and legislator of his people (and Moses himself as the greatest prophet in Israel's history.)

The text occasionally abruptly shifts from Moses' utterances to the narrator's comment, and back again. (Usually explanatory background information). Phrases include "... even to this day..." These breaks may allow the author/editor to *involve* his readers more in his message. The narrator is subtly reinforcing the *difference* between Moses' audience and his own audience, so they may be kept subtly aware of the distance.

The author, through his narrator, becomes the Moses of his generation.

The core of this address is the so-called Deuteronomic law-code (12:1 – 26:15) Phraseological, psychological, and temporal composition have an important bearing on our understanding of the ideological composition of the book.

The most basic point of view of a work is *ideological* or evaluative. The *phraseological* plane appears to be coextensive with "the plane of expression." The *spatio-temporal* plane involves the location in time and space from whose perspective an author, narrator, or character speaks in a work. The composition of a work on one plane may or may not concur with its composition on another plane.

*5 Moses convened all Israel and said to them:
"Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today;
you shall learn them and observe them diligently. 2 The Lord our God made a*

covenant with us at Horeb. ³ Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant but with us, who are all of us here alive today. ⁴ The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the fire. ⁵ (At that time I was standing between the Lord and you to declare to you the word of the Lord, for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain.) And he said:

There is a clear phraseological alternation in Moses' utterances here between an "I vs. you" form in verse 1,4 and 5, and an "our/us" form in vv. 2 and 3. One might well ask whether a shift is thereby indicated on other surface planes as well. Also do these surface shifts involve an ideological shift as well?

Moses is described as framing the reported words of God by means of his reporting utterances of 5:1 – 11:32 and 26:16 – 28:68. (p. 48). God is only quoted in direct discourse nine times in 24 chapters. These few direct utterances seem to have an important function. One can analyze the speech of a *character* (i.e., Moses) of a work in the same way as one analyzes the speech of an author or a narrator of a work.

We can see that the over-all composition of Deuteronomy is one in which we read how Moses is described as declaring and interpreting the word of God as a panoramic preview of how the Deuteronomic narrator will describe and interpret the word of Moses in Joshua – 2 Kings.

The Law Code (Chapter 12 – 26) predominantly employs phrases such as "your God" vs. "our God" which is used only once. (Moses uses the "our" form eleven times in the first address.). This is an indication of a psychological shift between the two addresses. He speaks as a fellow Israelite in the first address, but from the viewpoint of his role as a teacher in the second address.

All the Israelites heard the voice of God giving the ten words, but only Moses, at the elders' request and God's command, hears God's further words to be reported to the rest of the people. This is the main *psychological* viewpoint of the second address.

The second address is predominantly future-oriented, just as the first address was predominantly past-oriented.

Ideological Differences:

- **First Address:** Deuteronomic voice tends to emphasize the uniqueness of Moses or Israel, also tends to emphasize hope through the grace and mercy of God. The utterances that appear to diminish Moses' or Israel's unique status tend to emphasize law and God's retributive justice.
- **Second Address:** Full of utterances that exalt and emphasize Moses' and Israel's unique statuses. These lead to the idea that there will never be

another prophet like Moses, and no nation has enjoyed such a special status with the Lord as Israel. (All this in the context of God's retributive justice and covenant of law with Israel. *This tends to contradict the tentative conclusions we reached in analysis of the first address.*

After hearing the voice of God speak the words of the decalogue, the people fear that they cannot hear more and live. God agrees with this position and commands Moses to teach the people all the commandments, statutes, and ordinances he will tell him. The law code is precisely a report of Moses' teaching the people what God had told him. Moses did not in fact die as they thought they would had they heard the words of God which *he* had heard.

The "Mosaic" law code is the authenticating words of God that form the basis for the unique teaching role Moses enjoys in the Book of Deuteronomy. The utterances show the unique statuses of Moses and Israel.

However a direct challenge to Moses' unique status as teacher of Israel is launched directly at the source of Moses' central role in the book – the authenticating utterances of God in 5:28 – 31. "... I will raise up for them *a prophet like you* from among their brethren..." Moses would then no longer be unique.

– Robert Polzin (*from. Moses and the Deuteronomist: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History Part One: University Press, Indianapolis and Bloomington, 1980*)

Joshua – An Introduction – Part II

Deuteronomy, which crystallized as a canonical book during and after the sweeping religious reforms of King Josiah - the purported discovery of the book took place in 621 BCE – articulates an agenda of uncompromising monotheism that insists on two principal points: the exclusive centralization of the cult in Jerusalem and the absolute separation of the Israelites from the Canaanite population. There is an underlying connection between these two emphases: the worship of YHWH in sundry local sanctuaries and on rural hillside altars was liable to be more susceptible to the influence of Canaanite paganism, or so the Deuteronomist seems to have feared, than a central cult in Jerusalem overseen by a priestly bureaucracy and under the shadow of the monarchy. One strong expression of the program to separate the population is the injunction to carry out the ban in the conquest of the land and undertaking that at the fictional time of the writing of Deuteronomy, (the thirteenth century BCE) had not yet begun. The book of Joshua, then, which is offered as a report of the subsequent conquest, presents as a historical account the

implementation of that wholesale slaughter of the indigenous population in town after town.

The gruesome story is intended as an explanation of a circumstance observed by audiences of the book in the seventh century and later – that by then a non-Israelite Canaanite population was only vestigially in evidence. Where one might wonder, did all these peoples – seven in the traditional enumeration repeatedly invoked here – go? Joshua's answer is that they were wiped out in the conquest, as Deuteronomy had enjoined. But the narrative of the *h.erem* is a cover-up as well as an explanation. If the Canaanites seem to have disappeared, it was not because they were extirpated but because they had been assimilated by the Israelites, who had come to exercise political dominion over large portions of the land. There is good reason to assume that the Canaanites intermarried with the Israelites (a taboo for the Deuteronomist), had all kinds of social and economic intercourse with them, and shared with them many of their religious practices as well as many elements of their theology.

This story, then, of the annihilation of the indigenous population of Canaan belongs not to historical memory but rather to cultural memory, a concept that Ronald Handel has aptly applied to biblical literature in his book *Remembering Abraham*. That is to say, what is reported as the national past is grounded not in the factual historical experience of the nation but in the image of the nation that the guardians of the national literary legacy seek to fix for their audiences and for future generations. Thus, Israel is represented in this narrative as “a people that dwells apart”. (Numbers 23:9), though in historical actuality its life was intricately entangled not only with the sundry peoples of Canaan but also with the cultures of Egypt to the south and of Mesopotamia to the east.

The story of the Gibeonites recounted in Chapter 9 is in this regard an instructive case in point. The audience of the story, we may safely infer, would have been aware of the Gibeonites as a group of different ethnic stock from the Israelites yet “dwelling in their midst” – that is, having close social and economic relations with them, perhaps of the subservient order indicated in the biblical account. But what were they doing there if the systematic plan of conquest was to wipe out all traces of the indigenous inhabitants of the land? This difficulty is resolved by the account here of the subterfuge of the Gibeonites: disguising themselves as representatives of a people living in a distant country and hence not of peaceful coexistence with them, and hence for all future times they must be spared. The ostensible exception to the programmatic rule of total destruction is thus given a narrative explanation or etiology.

– Robert Alter (from the introduction to the translation/commentary on the Book of Joshua from *The Hebrew Bible – Translation and Commentary*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 2018)

Route of the Exodus



From Bible History Online
Vancouver, WA 98684

Joshua 1 – 12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (The Anchor Bible) – Thomas B. Dozeman, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2015

Joshua (The Old Testament Library) – Richard D. Nelson, Westminster John Knox Press, 1997

The Book of Judges (Old Testament Readings) – Marc Zvi Brettler, Routledge, London and New York, 2002

Moses and the Deuteronomist: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History Part One: – Robert Polzin, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis and Bloomington, 1980

The Hebrew Bible – Translation and Commentary (Prophets) – Robert Alter, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, London, 2018