

Periodization in Biblical Historiography: On the Structure and Unity of Israel's Story

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Abstract

The history of Israel recorded in the Hebrew Bible is structured around eight pivotal passages (Exodus 19:1–24:11; Joshua 22–24; 1 Samuel 8–15; 2 Samuel 5–8; 1 Kings 8; 1 Kings 18; 2 Kings 22:1–23:30; Nehemiah 7:72b–10:40) that describe moments of crucial change in the socio-political and religious make-up of this people. It is argued that these passages are related to each other, revealing a specific spiral model of historical periodization. The structure thus provided brings the various historical narratives of the Hebrew Bible together into a coherent, unified message.

Key words: History of Israel, biblical historiography, historical periodization, deuteronomistic history, Israelite identity

The Story

The Hebrew Bible is primarily and unequivocally concerned with the origins, life and fate of a people called “Israel.”¹ This focus becomes evident as early as

- 1 A most intriguing topic, the question of ancient Israel's historical existence has captured the imagination of many capable researchers and has generated an impressive amount of literature. P. R. Davies (*In Search of “Ancient Israel”* [JSOTSup 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], 21–30) has helpfully shown that when addressing this issue one may refer to any of three distinctive kinds of Israel: (1) a “biblical Israel,” i.e., the Israel “of faith” one meets as one reads the biblical text; (2) a “historical Israel,” i.e., something scholars interested in the history of Israel have created based on a combination of sources such as the biblical text, archeological discoveries, other texts from the same period and geographical area, and studies about the people groups and politics of the Ancient Near Eastern world; and (3) a “literary Israel,”

the story of Abraham begins to be unveiled (Gen. 12 onwards), although one could argue that traces of this interest are available even in the mythical pre-history given in the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis. The *nation*² called “Israel,” however, is brought to life in the narrative only at a later stage in an account describing the liberation and emancipation of a horde of slaves, who are, presumably, Abraham’s descendants. In what could be regarded as the greatest and most spectacular escape story of all times, these slaves are freed from forced

i.e., an Israel that is a literary construct, a creation of the authors of biblical stories telling Israel’s origins and life. This distinction, ignored in most studies dealing with ancient Israel, originates in the different presuppositions researchers hold about the nature and character of biblical records about Israel’s life. Two presuppositions the present author holds are: (1) that biblical narratives are ideological literature, that is, literature produced for a specific purpose that goes beyond entertainment or transmission of information; and (2) that this literature, although rooted in historical reality, is not, and was not intended to be, a factual witness to it (on this position, see further M. Z. Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* [London: Routledge, 1995]; and Y. Amit, *History and Ideology: An Introduction to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible* [BS 60; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999]). Within Davies’ scheme, the presuppositions spelled out above would lead to a search for the literary construct “Israel.” For such an approach, see T. L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archeology and the Myth of Israel* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); published in Great Britain as *The Bible in History: How Writers Create a Past* (London: Pimlico, 2000).

- 2 In light of contemporary debates in anthropology, my use of “nation” here may seem anachronistic. For instance, some of the most applauded authors in the field (see E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* [NPP; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983]; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* [2d ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990]; B. R. O’G. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* [rev. & extended ed., London/New York: Verso, 1991]; and P. J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002]) place the origins of the concept of “nationhood” no earlier than the Enlightenment. However, this position has been consistently critiqued by A. Hastings (*The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* [WL; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997]) and A. D. Smith (*The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* [Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000]). An alternative “ancient” origin for the concept has been powerfully advanced by A. D. Smith (*The Ethnic Origins of Nations* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986]; *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003]; *The Antiquity of Nations* [Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004]), who considers the Hebrew Bible concept of covenantal election as a paradigmatic example of the role religion plays in the formation of national identity (i.e. Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 44–65; on this see also D. I. Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology* [ETSS; 2d ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 2000]). From this perspective, then, the Hebrew Bible is a witness to “the fascinating manifestations of the shaping of national identities in earlier periods” (I. Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000], 3). Texts such as Gen. 10–11, to give but one example, support well the assertion that “‘nation’ ... is the primary category for mapping the world in the Bible” (Pardes, *Biography*, 3).

labor as construction workers for the Egyptian imperial house by none other than YHWH, their god, himself. The highlight of this escape comes when the runaways, who are led in their journey by Moses towards a “promised land,” arrive at Mount Sinai. There YHWH forms them into a “holy nation” by entering into a covenant with them that sets them apart as His chosen people. This covenant-making account (Exod. 19:1-24:11) is probably the most significant episode in the narrated life of Israel for it marks nothing less, I contend, than the very birth of this nation.

Following the aforementioned events, the Israelites wander for forty years through the wilderness, a journey which seems to be more about Israelite self-discovery, about learning what being a “holy nation” is, than it is about covering a particular distance. The conclusion of these forty years of wandering is Israel’s entrance into the “promised land,” that is, the land of Canaan, a land in which their forefathers used to dwell. The book of Joshua describes how, upon arriving in Canaan, the Israelites conquer city after city and how the land thus acquired is divided among the Israelite tribes. The culmination of this part of Israel’s story is the account of another covenant-making ceremony (Josh. 22–24), one which marks Israel’s transition from a life of wandering in the wilderness to a life as land-owners.

Having their own territory, however, is a difficult business, for Israelite supremacy in Canaan has nothing to do with their military capacity to subdue the original inhabitants of the land. Rather, supremacy in Canaan is contingent upon the Israelites faithfully upholding the covenantal stipulations that make them a “holy nation.” The book of Judges shows that their success and failure in fulfilling the monotheistic claims of the covenant constitute triggering factors in a repeating cycle of sin, judgment, repentance and deliverance that describes Israel’s life at this stage. In fact, this cycle is broken only when, in another significant narrative episode (1 Sam. 8–15), a change in the leadership pattern takes place as Saul becomes the first king of Israel.

The story continues in the remainder of the books of Samuel and Kings with describing Israel’s life during the monarchic era. Several episodes accounting for transitions in Israel’s life, which could also be regarded as defining national moments, structure this part of the narration. The first is the institution of monarchic rule given as another covenant-making story in which YHWH endorses David and his bloodline as the ruling dynasty (2 Sam. 5–8) over the whole of Israel. The second is the institution of Israel’s religion, available as the story of the dedication of the Temple Solomon builds for YHWH in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 8). The third and fourth episodes describe attempts at religious and national renewal that come after the decadence and division of Israel into two separate kingdoms takes place (q.v. 1 Kgs 12). One is Elijah’s challenge to the Israelites

from the Northern Kingdom that takes place on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18), and the other is the reform carried out by king Josiah of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 22:1–23:30), the king of the Southern Israelite Kingdom.

Israel's narrated life comes finally to an end in the Hebrew Bible in the same way in which it had begun. The Israelites, in spite of all reform efforts mentioned thus far, do not learn to faithfully uphold the covenant with YHWH. Consequently, they end up landless and subjugated. This situation, however, becomes an opportunity, for the Israelites once again experience YHWH's salvific power. In another exodus-like event, the remnants of this nation, now Babylonian slaves, return home from their exile. The culmination of this section is depicted as yet another covenant-making ceremony (Neh. 7:72b–10:40³), the last of its kind in the Hebrew Bible, in which these returnees are again shaped into a nation.

The Issue

It seems evident from the above that the story of Israel, as given in the Hebrew Bible, consists of several distinct parts delimited by and connected to each other through a series of transitional episodes that describe repetitive occurrences of covenant-making and national renewal in the life of the nation. The episodes thus identified are: Exod. 19:1–24:11, depicting the birth of Israel; Josh. 22–24, marking the transition from wilderness wandering and a nomadic way of life to settlement in the land of Canaan; 1 Sam. 8–15, depicting the transition from a tribal society of the period of the judges to kingship; 2 Sam. 5–8, marking the establishment of dynastic monarchic rule in Israel; 1 Kgs 8, marking the institution of religion in Israel; 1 Kgs 18, depicting an attempt at religious renewal in the Northern Israelite Kingdom; 2 Kgs 22:1–23:30, describing the reform carried out by King Josiah in the Southern Israelite Kingdom; and Neh. 7:72b–10:40, marking the re-birth of the nation upon the return of the Israelite captives from Babylon.

I suggest that the passages indicated here as significant chart the development of Israel's story available in the Hebrew Bible. Also, I suggest that when their function as transitions from one phase to another in Israel's narrated life becomes the lens through which the biblical material is seen, a pattern of historiographic periodization that is specific to this literature is revealed.⁴ The narrative blocks

3 Unless otherwise indicated, the verse numbering of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (ed. R. Kittel; 5th ed., Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990) is followed.

4 On periodization as a technique in the presentation of the biblical historiographical material, see S. Japhet, "Periodization – Between History and Ideology: The Neo-Babylonian Period in Biblical Historiography," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period* (ed. O. Lipschits and J. Blenkinsopp; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 75–89.

(periods) thus identified correspond to what N. K. Gottwald would see as successive socio-political stages in the historical development of Israel.⁵

Furthermore, I also suggest that these passages are related in various ways and as such they provide a structural skeleton for Israel's biblical story. This is a significant issue because, if any such structural pattern is revealed, a claim for coherence and a unifying thread that brings together the narrative material available in the Hebrew Bible could be made. Below I will attempt to substantiate these assertions.

The Deuteronomy Connection

Previous research on the material under scrutiny here provides strong arguments in favor of the claim that the passages listed above are both related and structurally significant. Admittedly, these arguments were developed at different times by different scholars making different points. There is profit, however, in entering the discussion after all this work has been done, for now one has the advantage of considering the results of research unavailable to earlier critics. Thus, looking at the various studies that were available to me, I came to the conclusion that critical scholarship associates virtually all these passages with the book of Deuteronomy. The first one to do so in a systematic way was W. M. L. de Wette in his *Dissertatio critico-exegetica qua Deuteronomium a prioribus Pentateuchi libris diversum*.⁶ After undertaking an analysis of the vocabulary, literary style and theological ideas of the book of Deuteronomy, and after showing how these ideas are reflected in the national and religious reform carried out by King Josiah (q.v. 2 Kgs 22–23), de Wette concluded that the Book of the Law found in the Jerusalem temple during Josiah's reign consisted of the literary core from which Deuteronomy later developed.⁷

5 See N. K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 598.

6 (Jena: Leteris Eitzdorfii, 1805). This work is de Wette's doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Jena in 1804. It was later reprinted as *Dissertatio critica, qua Deuteronomium a prioribus Pentateuchi libris diversum, allius cuiusdam recentioris auctoris opus esse monstratur in Opuscula Theologica* (Berlin: Reimer, 1830).

7 De Wette's conclusion is foreshadowed in the pre-critical literature (i.e., Jerome, *Commentariorum in Ezechielem Prophetam* 1:1 [Migne, PL 25]; T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, EW III, 516). In critical scholarship, although most commentators would agree with de Wette's conclusion, the exact shape the "Book of the Law" had and how much of the book of Deuteronomy in its present form can be traced back to it is a matter of debate. Proposals range from as much as "most of Deuteronomy ... [and] the whole corpus of the Torah" (W. C. Kaiser, *A History of Israel from the Bronze Age through the Jewish Wars* [Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1998], 392), to as little as the law-code contained in Deut. 12–26 (see J. Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des alten Testaments* [2d ed., Berlin: Reimer, 1889],

Admittedly, de Wette's primary aim was to establish a date for the writing of the book of Deuteronomy and not to establish the influence of Deuteronomy on the text of 2 Kings, or vice versa. However, the very fact that de Wette bases his claim on a comparison of the themes present in two sets of texts prompts the conclusion that the relationship between those texts is primarily literary.

Going beyond the association established above, the idea that the book of Deuteronomy played a central role as an interpretive key in the literary development of other parts of the Hebrew Bible was first articulated by M. Noth.⁸

189–95), or even less, to the “Song of Moses” found in Deut. 32 (see J. R. Lundbom, “The Lawbook of the Josianic Reform,” CBQ 38 [1976]: 293–302]). Of course, there are also those who find difficulty with de Wette's proposal. See, for instance, O. Eissfeldt, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament, unter Einschluß der Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen sowie der apokryphen und pseudepigraphenartigen Qumrân-Schriften; Entstehungsgeschichte Entstehungsgeschichte des Alten Testaments* (NTG; 2d ed., Tübingen: Mohr, 1956), 202–209, and E. W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 18–36. I suggest that a conclusive decision on the matter may never be reached simply because the biblical evidence available (2 Kgs 22:1–23:28 and 2 Chr. 34:1–35:19) allows for two possible scenarios in regard to the apparition and use of the Book of the Law in Josiah's time. While in 2 Kings the reform is a direct consequence of the fact that the Book of the Law was found and read in front of the king, in 2 Chronicles, the Book of the Law only confirms and justifies a reform that is already under way (for a comparison of the two accounts, see L. Eslinger, “Josiah and the Torah Book: Comparison of 2 Kgs 22:1–23:28 and 2 Chr 34:1–35:19,” HAR 10 [1986]: 37–62). The complication resulting from this difference has to do with the date of the writing. If the order of the events given in 2 Kings is preferred, then the Book of the Law must have been written at an early date and then hidden in the Temple during Manasseh's reign in order to save it from destruction (so Kaiser, *History of Israel*, 392). If the order of the events given in 2 Chronicles is preferred, then one could suspect that the finding of the book was an event prepared in detail by the king and the high-priest as a means to justify a reform that was already taking place and then the date of the writing should be placed somewhere during Josiah's reign (so J. Rosenbaum, “Hezekiah's Reform and the Deuteronomistic Tradition,” HTR 72 [1979]: 23–43). Alternatively, one may even argue that the “discovery” of the Book of the Law in both 2 Kgs 22 and 2 Chr. 34 has a rhetorical purpose and does not report a historical event. According to C. Römer (“Transformations in Deuteronomistic and Biblical Historiography: ‘On Book-Finding’ and Other Literary Strategies,” ZAW 109 [1997]: 1–11) and K. Stott (“Finding the Lost Book of the Law: Re-reading the Story of ‘The Book of the Law’ [Deuteronomy–2 Kings] in Light of Classical Literature,” JSOT 30 [2005]: 153–69), the existence of similar book-discovery accounts in classical literature may indicate that such reports are literary ploys used to boost the credibility of the writing within which they appear.

- 8 See *The Deuteronomistic History* (trans. J. Doull et al; JSOTSupp 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), trans. of *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien I: Die sammelnden und bearbeitenden Geschichtswerke im Alten Testament* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1957), 1–110, repr. of *Schriften der Königsberger Gelehrten Gesellschaft* (Geisteswissenschaftliche Klasse 18; Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1943), 43–266. Noth's proposal has opened the way for an entire array of studies that investigate possible influences of Deuteronomy on various parts of the Bible, as well as studies that reflect on the applicability and implications of Noth's theory. Two collections of essays,

After analyzing the method of collecting and reworking sources employed in the creation of the Former Prophets, Noth highlighted a thread of theological/ideological interpretation that binds together as a whole the books of Joshua–2 Kings; and since the ideological stance characterizing this “thread” is that of the teachings of Deuteronomy, he termed this corpus of literature “Deuteronomistic History.” Particularly significant for the present argument are the observations Noth makes in regard to the method used by the redactor(s) of this corpus of literature to imprint on it the Deuteronomic⁹ ideology:

To assess the work as a whole, it is more important to notice certain aspects of the arrangement of the books Joshua–Kings which can be traced back to the work of Dtr. In particular, at all the important points in the course of the history, Dtr. brings forward the leading personages with a speech, long or short, which looks forward and backward in an attempt to interpret the course of events, and draws the relevant practical conclusions about what people should do.¹⁰

Some of the passages I have identified above as structurally significant are in fact mentioned by Noth and are therefore associated theologically and literarily with the book of Deuteronomy and with each other. These are Joshua’s farewell address (Josh. 23), Samuel’s farewell address (1 Sam. 12) and Solomon’s extended prayer given at the dedication of the temple (1 Kgs 8).¹¹

which are representative of these discussions and which make unnecessary any rehearsal here of post-Noth developments, are available: L. S. Shearing and S. L. McKenzie, eds., *Those Elusive Deuteronomists: The Phenomenon of Pan-Deuteronomism* (JSOTSup 268; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); and Albert de Pury, Thomas C. Römer and Jean-Daniel Macchi, eds., *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research* (trans. Jean-Daniel Macchi; JSOT Supp 306; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), trans. of *Israël construit son histoire: L’historiographie deutéronomiste à la lumière des recherches récentes* (Le Monde de la Bible 34; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1996).

9 The distinction made by Noth (*Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*, 3–18) between “deuteronomic” (as referring to the book of Deuteronomy and the ideas/ideals it promotes) and “deuteronomistic” (as referring to the historical works influenced by “deuteronomic” thought, that is, Joshua–2 Kings) is followed here. However, this does not extend to also include Noth’s view on the authorship of the two bodies of literature. Such a position would not do justice to post-Noth proposals on the redactions of Deuteronomy and of the Deuteronomistic corpus.

10 Noth, *Deuteronomistic History*, 5.

11 Besides these texts, Noth mentions several other passages: (Judg. 2.11ff; Josh. 1; Josh. 12; 2 Kgs 17.7ff). With the exception of Josh. 1, though, these are all evaluative comments made by the redactor and therefore do not fall into the same category as the texts selected above which are speeches placed on the lips of various important characters in the story. As for Josh. 1, this passage is not included in my choice of texts due to the fact that, although a speech, contextually it lacks other parameters that would make it a transition episode, one that can be considered a culmination in Israel’s story. More on this will be said below.

Building upon Noth's work, important contributions to the idea that the book of Deuteronomy and the so-called Deuteronomistic History are related have been brought forth by G. von Rad¹² and later by W. Brueggemann¹³ and by H. W. Wolff.¹⁴ These have emphasized the style of proclamation characteristic to Deuteronomy and have noted that the same style is continued in the Joshua–2 Kings corpus of literature in “historical recitals” (speeches, prayers, comments) recounting YHWH's salvific activity on behalf of Israel. Besides the passages Noth suggested as significant from a redactional point of view, these authors have added two other theologically important speeches to the list: Joshua's prophetic discourse given in Josh. 24 and YHWH's promise to David given in 2 Sam. 7.

It is then clear from the above that the conclusions reached by Noth and his followers, when added to de Wette's insights, help associate all but three of the passages singled out above. As for the remaining texts, although not being included in any Noth or post-Noth lists of Deuteronomistic interventions (in the case of 1 Kgs 18), or not being regarded as part of the so-called “Deuteronomistic History”, they have however been associated with Deuteronomistic thought. In regard to Exod. 19:1–24:11, E. W. Nicholson has offered a convincing argument that the Decalogue this passage contains (q.v. Exod. 20) is a Deuteronomic insertion.¹⁵

In regard to Neh. 7:72b–10:40, J. A. Williams¹⁶ has shown that characteristic Deuteronomic phraseology is present in 9:2, 3, 8, 6, 10, 16, 17, 18, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34 and 10:30. Also, themes that stand out in Neh. 8–10 as well as in 1 Kgs 18, such as Torah obedience, community, the failure of kingship, and prophetic leadership¹⁷ have long been identified as ideas characteristic to the Deuteronomist(s).¹⁸ As such, although it would be premature to label passages

12 See *Studies in Deuteronomy* (trans. D. G. M. Stalker; SBT 9; London: SCM Press, 1953), trans. of *Deuteronomium-Studien* (FRLANT ns/40; GR 58; rev. ed.; Göttingen: Vandenkoek and Ruprecht, 1948).

13 See “The Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historian,” *Int* 22 (1968): 388–402.

14 See “The Kerygma of the Deuteronomic Historical Work,” in *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (ed., W. Brueggemann and H. W. Wolff; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975), 83–100.

15 See E. W. Nicholson, “The Decalogue as the Direct Address of God,” *VT* 27 (1977): 422–33; *Idem*, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

16 “A Conceptual History of Deuteronomism in the Old Testament, Judaism, and the New Testament” (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky., 1976).

17 See the analysis in M. V. Măcelaru, “From Divine Speech to National/Ethnic Self-Definition in the Hebrew Bible: Representation(s) of Identity and the Motif of Divine–Human Distancing in Israel's Story” (D.Phil. diss., Faculty of Theology, Worcester College, University of Oxford, 2007), 229–62.

18 For instance, see G. E. Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History* (SBLDS

such as these as “Deuteronomistic”, the evidence available indicates that there are linguistic and thematic connections between them, the book of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic literature.

Taking all the above into account, it seems to me that critical scholarship provides sufficient grounds for making the claim that the eight passages in view here share a common characteristic: that is, they are all, in one way or another, associated with Deuteronomic thought and literature, and therefore associated with each other as well.

The Evidence of Similarity

The case made above is strengthened further when taking into account the fact that these eight passages are similar in various ways. First and foremost, each of them makes some reference to Israel’s origins. Such references are, in most cases, direct discourses embedded in the narrative, which in each case describes a situation of national, ethnic and/or religious crisis in Israel’s life. Within these contexts, then, the reference to Israel’s origins provides a definition of identity by pointing out how Israel came to be. These references to Israel’s past are available in: YHWH’s speeches in Exod. 19–23, Joshua’s farewell addresses in Josh. 23–24, Samuel’s farewell speech in 1 Sam. 12, YHWH’s promise to David through prophetic utterance in 2 Sam. 7, Solomon’s public prayer in 1 Kgs 8, Elijah’s verbal challenge to Israel in 1 Kgs 18, the “Book of the Law” in 2 Kgs 22 whose identity-forming content can be deduced from the parameters of Josiah’s reform,¹⁹ and the communal prayer in Neh. 9.

It is relevant to note here that such references to Israel’s origins have also been observed by G. von Rad²⁰; he labeled these “historical recitals” and connected them to each other by remarking that, no matter the brevity of the recital, the following three core elements are always present: an allusion to Israel’s ancestors,

87; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); P. J. Davies, “‘A wise and understanding people’: The Deuteronomic Portrait of Community and Discipleship as a Pattern for Christian Mission” (M.A. diss., All Nations Christian College, Hertfordshire, England, 1994); and P. T. Vogt, *Deuteronomistic Theology and the Significance of Torah: A Reappraisal* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2006).

19 See more on this in M. V. Măcelaru, “Phoenix Rising: Josiah’s ‘Book of the Law’ and the Rebirth of Israel,” in *Bible, Culture, Context* (ed. C. Constantineanu and M. V. Măcelaru; Osijek: Evanđeoski teološki fakultet, 2009), 65–84.

20 *Old Testament Theology 1: The Theology of Israel’s Historical Traditions* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; London: Harper & Row, 1962), trans. of *Theologie des Alten Testaments 1: Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferungen Israels* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1957), 108–109.

a reference to the liberation from Egyptian slavery, and a mention of Israel's entry into the Promised Land. Furthermore, he observed that the context in which these recitals take place is always a ceremony or ritual situation. Admittedly, von Rad did not directly discuss the role these recitals have as expressions of identity. However, his discovery prompted Paul Ricoeur²¹ to remark that Israel's founding events, being integrated in a nexus of narrative events recounting the saving acts of Yahweh in relation to his people, and being sustained and transmitted by a continuous intellectual activity of reinterpretation and re-telling, led to a primacy of the narrative dimension in the self-understanding of these people. Furthermore, this narrative intelligence, through which Israel tries to understand its own past as a comprehensible and unified whole, and through which it searches for significance by pointing towards the future, is precisely the central element of the identity of this people. It is by interpreting and elaborating on the traditions of its origins that the Israel of later periods imagined itself as standing in an indivisible unity with the Israel of the deliverance from Egypt, of the revelation on Mount Sinai, of the wandering in the wilderness, and of the entering into the Promised Land. Since historical research has shown that there probably was never a real unity of one ethnic Israel, we are left with one option – through the work of reinterpretation and retelling of her origins, Israel assumed a group identity. Given these, it is plausible to argue that the shared concern with identity that binds the eight pivotal passages identified above provides the structural skeleton on which a coherent plot narrating Israel's life is built.²²

Following from the above we may notice a second similarity that connects these passages – that is, the fact that in each of them the identity recital is the result of an interaction between a triad of characters consisting always of YHWH, Israel and Israel's leader(s). Concretely, at times, the retelling of Israel's origins is pronounced by YHWH while addressing the people and their leader (Exod. 20–23). At other times the retelling is placed on the lips of prominent characters such as Joshua (Josh. 23), Samuel (1 Sam. 12), Solomon (1 Kgs 8) and Elijah (1 Kgs 18:36–37), or the narrative implies that such a speech takes place, as is the case with Josiah (2 Kgs 23:1–3). At yet other times, the retelling occurs as a dialogue between all three characters (Josh. 24) or between YHWH and Israel's leader (2 Sam. 7). Finally, at times, the retelling becomes a communal undertaking (Neh. 9). Whatever form the retelling takes, though, it is closely associated in each passage with the activity of a character that plays a significant leadership role in

21 “Structure and Hermeneutics,” in *The Conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston: North Western University Press, 1974), 27–61.

22 Regarding the concern with identity definition in Israel's story, see Măcelaru, “From Divine Speech to National/Ethnic Self-Definition.”

Israel's story. Such connections, clearly implied in Noth's proposal above, seem to be characteristic of how ancient authors convinced their audiences of the validity of their message. Driver, for instance, offers a helpful explanation with reference to the emergence of Deuteronomy during Josiah's reign that incidentally clearly describes such practices and the rationale behind them:

The imaginative revivification of the past, by means of discourses, conversations, and even of actions, attributed dramatically to characters who have figured upon the stage of history, has been abundantly exemplified in literature: the educational influence, and moral value, of such creations of human art have been universally allowed: the dialogues of Plato, the epic of Dante, the tragedies of Shakespeare, the *Paradise Lost*, and even the poem of Job, to name but a few of the great imaginative creations of genius, have never been condemned as immoral frauds, because the characters introduced in them did not always – or ever – use the actual words attributed to them. But the author, in each case, having a message to deliver, or a lesson to teach, placed it in the mouth of the person whose character was appropriate, or whose personality would give it force, and so presented it to the world. *Mutatis mutandis*, the procedure of the Deuteronomist was similar. No elaborate literary machinery was needed by him: a single character would suffice. He places Moses on the stage, and exhibits him pleading his case with the degenerate Israel of Josiah's day. In doing this, he assumes no unjustifiable liberty, and makes no unfair use of Moses' name: he does not invest him with a fictitious character; he does not claim his authority for ends which he would have disavowed; he merely develops, with great moral energy and rhetorical power, and in a form adapted to the age in which he lived himself, principles which Moses had beyond all questions advocated, and arguments which he would have cordially accepted as his own.²³

Although Driver is referring here to the writer of Deuteronomy in particular, this could very well be taken as a description of the method used by biblical story tellers in general to deliver a powerful message, to call for revitalization, and to try to reshape their people's ethnic/national identity.

Moreover, incidentally, Driver's description above also introduces a final point to be made about the way in which the passages in view are connected, that is, the emphasis which is placed on the description of these characters in superlative language as if to suggest that "...they are persons who represent the struggle for the establishment and preservation of Israelite national identity..."²⁴ In this regard,

23 S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895), lvii–lix.

24 R. R. Hutton, *Charisma and Authority in Israelite Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 66. Weisman makes a similar observation when he says that "each of these saviours was

Knoppers²⁵ has argued that the redactor of the material in the book of Kings used a criterion of incomparability to identify characters that play significant roles in the story. He makes reference to Solomon's incomparable wisdom (1 Kgs 3:12) and wealth (1 Kgs 10:23), to Hezekiah's incomparable trust in YHWH (2 Kgs 18:5) and to Josiah's incomparable activity as a reformer (2 Kgs 23:25). In addition to these, I suggest that the use of similar criteria of incomparability and of other forms of superlative language in regard to other characters in the story should be taken into account as well: Moses is the humblest man on the face of earth (Num. 12:3) and the prophet *par excellence* (Deut. 34:10-12); Joshua has special wisdom (Deut. 34:9), no one can oppose him successfully (Josh. 1:5) and his relationship with YHWH is comparable with that which Moses had (Josh. 1:5); Samuel is the trustworthy prophet of YHWH whose prophecies never fail (1 Sam. 3:19-20; cf. Jer. 15.1 where he is given a status equal to that of Moses); David is more successful than anyone because YHWH is with him and favors him (1 Sam. 18:14; 18:30; 2 Sam. 5:10; 23:1); Elijah performs incomparable miracles and ascends to heaven in a chariot of fire (q.v. 2 Kgs 2:9; cf. Sir. 48:4); Ezra is the Torah interpreter *par excellence* (e.g. Ezra 7:10; Neh. 8:13) and, together with Nehemiah, is a nation re-builder comparable only to Moses. Thus, these characters are clearly given a special status in the story. I suggest, together with Clements,²⁶ that they "have become 'umbrella figures' under whom national and religious ideals and institutions of later ages have been made to shelter."

Conclusion

The argument developed thus far has pointed out two important facts. First, it has been shown that the eight passages under scrutiny are pivotal in the development of Israel's biblical story. Second, it has been argued that these passages are connected to each other in various ways, and are similar concerning Israel's

unique, and each of them emerged in his own way to rescue his people from their enemies in the critical circumstances of the time. Whether his activity rose out of a spontaneous impulse to serve the immediate needs of his close environment, or his historical consciousness made him identify himself with the interests of his people, the charismatic saviour represented by his deeds the embryonic national leadership of the Israelite state in formation" (Z. Weisman, "Charismatic Leaders in the Era of the Judges," ZAW 89 [1977]: 410-11). Both Hutton and Weisman refer here to the characters in the book of Judges, but I would argue that these statements apply even more to the figures identified above.

25 G. N. Knoppers, "'There was none like him': Incomparability in the Books of Kings," CBQ 54 (1992): 411-31.

26 R. E. Clements, *Prophecy and Tradition* (GPT; Oxford: Blackwell, 1975), 27.

identity. As such, it is clear that these mark the development of Israel's narrated life by providing a unique mode of story telling specific to this story. I propose that the model advanced by Dailey²⁷ in regard to how temporal development is depicted in apocalyptic literature is comparable to how Israel's story unfolds, that is, in a spiral fashion. This, in fact, accounts for the repetitive patterns in the story, for the recurrence of episodes of changes in the national status at certain intervals and for the structural connections that exist between these accounts. As such, although depicted in the story as separated in time, the eight passages suggested hold the story together as they map the unfolding of its spiraling plot. In conclusion, there seems to be a unique model of historical periodization available in Israel's biblical story which, when seen as a whole, allows for a coherent reading of the various narrative texts that make up this story in spite of their less than unified literary history. Such an understanding, expressed well by Jobling below, may prove helpful when trying to understand the Bible as a unified message:

I see the Bible performing a function close to that of myth as understood by Claude Lévi-Strauss. According to him, myth deals with a society's defining beliefs and with fundamental contradictions in its system of belief. The work of myth is to give a sense that these contradictions have been resolved—though they are in principle beyond resolution—and thus to make existence tolerable for the society. I do not equate biblical narrative with myth, since that term is best kept for the products of societies where the sense of history is much less developed than in Israel. But when the past is viewed from a sufficient distance and for the purpose of explaining the present, as I believe is the case with the Bible, historiography functions very like myth. Lévi-Strauss insists that a society's mythic record can only be understood as a total system comprising many particular myths. In the case of the Bible the total system means the whole narrative, and eventually the whole canon.²⁸

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27 "Non-Linear Time in Apocalyptic Texts: The Spiral Model," *SBL Seminar Papers 1999* (Atlanta: SBL, 1999), 231–45.

28 D. Jobling, *1 Samuel* (BOSHNP; Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 6.

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Periodizacija u biblijskoj historiografiji: O strukturi i cjelini priče o Izraelu

Sažetak

Povijest Izraela koja je zapisana u Hebrejskoj Bibliji strukturirana je oko osam ključnih odlomaka (Izl 19,1-24,11; Jš 22-24; 1 Sam 8-15; 2 Sam 5-8; 1 Kr 8; 1 Kr 18; 2 Kr 22,1-23,30; Neh 7,72b-10,40). Ovi odlomci opisuju trenutke ključne promjene u socio-političkom i religijskom uređenju toga naroda. Tvrdi se da su ti odlomci uzajamno povezani i otkrivaju specifičan spiralni model povijesne periodizacije. Ovako ponuđena struktura povezuje različite povijesne pripovijetke Hebrejske Biblije u jedinstvenu poruku.