

MTP/HB Introduction to the Hebrew Bible
Deuteronomistic History (DH) Lecture
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In 1943, a German scholar of the Hebrew Bible, Martin Noth, put forth the theory that the biblical books of Joshua-2 Kings were the work of one writer/composer, who sought to record a history of Israel during the Babylonian Exile.¹ Based on a shared theology and similar language, Noth argued that these texts were a unified history of Israel. Utilizing a variety of sources, the Deuteronomistic historians retold Israel's story, from emergence in the Promise Land until the fall of Jerusalem, pointing out where the people "went wrong" and made mistakes that eventually led to the exile (e.g., choosing a human ruler over God, worshipping other gods, failing to care for the vulnerable, etc.). Since this recounting was done through hindsight, which is usually 20-20, the compiler was able to clearly identify the bad decisions and the ways that the people broke covenant with God and with each other.

What the Deuteronomistic History (DH) presents for the reader is an act-consequence ("you reap what you sow") understanding of God's interaction with Israel (humanity). When the Israelites were faithful to the covenant, God "blessed" their lives. However, when the people broke the covenant, God "punished" them. The overarching theological schema is "apostasy – punishment (oppression) – repentance – salvation (restoration)". We must remember, though, that this version of Israel's "history" was told from the perspective of the powerful, and thus it represents only one view of how the events leading to the exile unfolded. Other voices, which challenged such a simplistic theological framework, are found in Job and Ecclesiastes. Since Noth's time, scholars have come to envision the creation of this "history" as being the work of more than one person, perhaps a "school" or at least a group of likeminded people. The final

¹ Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History, Second Edition* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

compilation of the DH is usually placed either at the end of the Babylonian Exile or just after the return from exile (6th-5th centuries BCE).

Joshua

The book of Joshua follows on the heels of Moses' farewell address found in Deuteronomy. It recounts how Israel ended-up in (at least parts of) the Promise Land, portraying a "military conquest" of those peoples already in the land of Canaan. About half of the book deals with this "entry" and half with land allotments. According to Joshua, the conquest started in the center of Canaan and then went south and finally north. There is more information on the central and southern campaigns than on the northern ones. Even within the stories of military conquests, there is evidence that the Israelites did not wipe out all of their opponents (e.g., the Gibeonites in Josh 9). [More information about the "conquest" is found in a separate lecture, "How did Israel Get into the Promise Land".]

We will look at Joshua 3 for some insight into this book. In his final address, Moses had already identified Joshua, son of Nun, to be his successor as leader of the people. Thus, on one level this 3rd chapter is about God's ordaining Joshua as the divinely recognized leader of the Israelites. On another level, though, this chapter along with Ch 4 is about Israel's transition from wandering in the wilderness to settlement in the Promised Land. From this perspective on the story, one cannot help but believe that the similarity between the crossing of the Jordan River and the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, in Exodus 14-15, was intentional on the part of the biblical storytellers and editors. This parallel had already been recognized by the author of Ps 114.

¹When Israel went out from Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,

²Judah became God's sanctuary,
Israel God's dominion.

³The sea looked and fled;

Jordan turned back.

⁴The mountains skipped like rams,
the hills like lambs.

⁵Why is it, O sea, that you flee?
O Jordan, that you turn back?

⁶O mountains, that you skip like rams?
O hills, like lambs?

⁷Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the LORD,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,

⁸Who turns the rock into a pool of water,
the flint into a spring of water.

Just as the crossing of the Sea of Reeds was a key transition in Israel's story from oppression to freedom, this crossing represents a passage from uncertainty to security. No longer will the people have to wander about homeless; now they will have a place to call their own. At long last, the covenant made with Sarah and Abraham, which promised offspring and a land, will be fulfilled.

It might be helpful to refresh our memories of what has led up to this scene in the history of ancient Israel. According to the biblical internal chronology, less than a half a century has passed, since the Hebrew slaves were moaning under the oppression of the Egyptian government. After some incredible experiences, natural or miraculous, the slaves were led out of Egypt by the prodigal son, Moses, along with Miriam and Aaron. A sea parted for their safe passage and closed back up just in time to destroy the army pursuing them. At Mt Sinai, they once again witnessed the awesome presence of God and entered into a lifelong covenant with the LORD. They've eaten manna they did not plant and quails they did not kill. This motley group of people have whined and bellyached when the going got tough, but surprisingly God has shown incredible patience, except for that little matter of not allowing the exodus generation, including Moses, to enter the Promise Land. Only Joshua and Caleb were allowed to enter,

because of their faithfulness. The others have now earned their eternal rest, and there is a new group who are poised on an unknown future.

The story found in the 3rd chapter of the book of Joshua recounts another miraculous event in the journey of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promise Land. Once again, the obstacle standing between them and the future is a body of water, the Jordan River. And, once again, God will provide a safe passage for God's people. These verses tell a marvelous story of how the very presence of God caused the waters of the Jordan River to cease from flowing, allowing the Israelites to cross into the Promise Land on dry ground. The first time I read this text, I envisioned some incredible sight, similar to the numerous attempts by Hollywood filmmakers to dramatize Moses' parting the Sea of Reeds. You know the ones where the ocean-like body of water suddenly divides into two very tall walls of water, held back only by the power of God elicited by Moses' holding up his staff. My mental image of the Jordan River was something similar to the scene in "City Slickers", where Billy Crystal and his buddies must cross a swollen, raging river along with the cattle herd they are driving cross country. The river is so flooded and the currents are so fierce that Norman, Billy Crystal's pet calf, is swept downstream and Billy with him. The scene is very suspenseful as the friends on shore battle to save Crystal and Norman. This is the kind of river I would have used in filming the movie version of Joshua 3.

The only problem with my screenplay was that, up until January of 1999, I had never been to Israel nor had I ever seen more than a photograph of the Jordan River. I had always imagined it to be similar to the mighty Mississippi, so wide at points that one could hardly see across to the other side. This picture of the Jordan supported my movie image. It was a remarkable, almost unbelievable, story. Imagine my surprise and disappointment when I first laid eyes on the Jordan River only to learn that it was nothing like the grandiose river of my imagination but rather was more like what some might call a creek. In fact, there are places along the river that one can actually jump

across to the other side. The reality of the Jordan River did not match my grandiose Hollywood images.

Now, one might think that my firsthand knowledge of the river would detract from the power this story held for me, but it had the opposite effect. I know from personal experience that there are times when a little stream of water can seem like an ocean, when it separates me from reaching my goals. No, the size really did not matter. Instead, the experience of the Jordan River made the story in Joshua 3 more about God and God's people than about some suspension of the rules of nature. In the movie "Bruce Almighty", the character "God", played by Morgan Freeman puts it this way: "Splitting a sea (or a river) is no miracle; it's a magic trick." The real miracle is that a group of people had courage enough to risk everything for their faith in God.

In the opening verses of Josh 3, we learn that, before this crossing of the Jordan can take place, something is required of the community. The people are told to prepare themselves for this upcoming experience. Joshua says to the community, "Sanctify yourselves." The Hebrew word translated as "sanctify" comes from the root word, *qdsh*, which means "holy" and is often used to describe God and God's holiness. The form used in v 5, indicates that the people are to make themselves "holy as God is holy". In order for the people to gain the full benefit of what God is about to do, they must prepare their whole selves to stand in the presence of the Divine and to be transformed by God's presence and a promise of an unknown future. Once they make themselves open to God's holiness, it will not matter if God suspends the flow of a mighty river or simply shows them the best place to jump across the creek.

Judges

The theology of the Deuteronomistic History (act-consequence) comes into full view with the stories in Judges. Judges claims to be set in a time in Israel's history between entry into the Promise Land and the beginning of the Monarchy, the "Time of the Judges", but most scholars would agree that, although these stories may have ancient

origins, the collecting and editing took place during the Babylonian Exile, or just after the return from exile, in the 6th century BCE. During these early decades of life in the “Promised Land”, the people were led by charismatic, mostly military, leaders called “judges”. These were persons whom God raised-up among the people to save them from a foreign enemy.

This was a time of turmoil, in which the Israelites are described as living in tribes who have a loose association, usually centered around worship and/or necessity for survival (e.g., water, military support, etc.). No permanent human leader ruled in the land because the people were to understand God as their only ruler. However, the people continually broke covenant with God and, as a result, suffered under the hand of a foreign power. Only when the people repented of their sin and called out to the LORD did God send a means of deliverance, in the form of a leader who would acquire the needed victory over the enemy. In each situation, though, the people soon forget their past and break covenant again. From a literary perspective, some have identified the materials in Judges as “historical romances”, with “historical” referring to the literary setting (not that they are meant to be reliable sources for history) and “romances” indicating the important role that heroes play in the stories.

Most of the vignettes about these heroes follow the same pattern, which also is indicative of the theological framework of Judges: apostasy – oppression – repentance – salvation. The Israelites sin against God (usually by worshiping other deities); God punishes them by allowing a foreign ruler to oppress the Israelites; the people realize their sinfulness and repent; and God raises-up a hero (“judge”²) to liberate the Israelites from the foreign oppressor. In Judges, though, this cycle is repeated time and time again, until the end of Judges, where we find the statement: “In those days

² In the Book of Judges, the role of a “judge” (Hebrew *shophet*) does not match how we understand the role of judges in our own time (i.e., presiding over the proper application of law in the legal system). The primary function of the biblical judges was to be a military hero and overthrow whatever outside power was controlling Israel. Then, usually, the judge would lead the people for a certain period of rest. A few times these “judges” do have a more traditionally judicial role (as we will see with Deborah), but that is never their primary function.

there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judg 21:25). This sets the stage for why a monarchy, or at least a centralized government, was needed to bring order to the Israelites and aid in their keeping the covenant with God and each other. However, Israel's having a human ruler, a monarch, turned out to have its own set of problems, but that is covered in the books of Samuel & Kings.

One example text from Judges introduces us to the only female judge, Deborah. The full story of Deborah is found in Judges 4 and 5, in a prose version and then in a poem. Deborah's story begins with what is a formulaic statement in Judges: "The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord" (Judg 4:1). Following the cycle of the Deuteronomistic History, the text continues with the statement that God allowed a foreign ruler, in this case King Jabin of Canaan, to have control over the Israelites. We are also given the name of King Jabin's military commander, Sisera. After being under siege and oppressed for 20 years, the Israelites cry to God for help. With a change of scene, we meet Deborah, who is first introduced as a prophet, who was "judging Israel" (Judg 4:4).

When Deborah took up her position under a palm tree in the "hill country of Ephraim", the Israelites would go to her for adjudication of their disputes. In this first encounter, then, Deborah actually fulfills the role that we envision for a judge. In the majority of translations, she is also identified as the "wife of Lappidoth". Several scholars have provided solid exegesis of the phrase "*eshet lapidoth*", suggesting that a better translation might be "fiery woman" or "woman of lightning", rather than a statement that Deborah is married. Either interpretation, though, does not change the fact that in Judg 4, Deborah is given two titles usually reserved for men: judge and prophet (except, Miriam was described as a prophet in Exodus). Given the preceding stories of Israel, nothing has prepared us, though, to see a woman in a military role or as a warrior. Despite the fact that, in the surrounding cultures of Ancient Israel, women did serve in the military, and many of the ANE goddesses were described as warriors. In Israel, all the soldiers have been portrayed as males.

The story goes on to indicate that God has visited Deborah and given her a message for her military commander, Barak. The LORD has told her that the time has come to defeat Sisera and Jabin's army, and to put an end to the Israelites' oppression. Barak is not so eager to take on this mission, and one can understand why. The Canaanites' military is described as being much more advanced in weaponry than the Israelites' army; they had "nine hundred chariots of iron" (v 3). Even though God has promised to give Barak and the Israelites the victory over their oppressors, Barak seems to test Deborah's sincerity and honesty. Only if she will go too, will Barak take on the mission. Deborah agrees to accompany Barak and the army into battle, but she tells Barak that he will not get the credit for defeating Sisera and Jabin's army; rather that victory will be gained by "the hand of a woman" (v 9b).

As promised, God does give the Israelites the victory over King Jabin's army. Sisera flees the battle to save his life and seeks sanctuary in the tent of Heber, the Kenite, with whom Sisera's people have a treaty. However, Heber is not home when Sisera arrives. Jael offers hospitality to Sisera, promising to protect him from the enemy, but once he is asleep, Jael drives a tent peg through the general's temple and kills him. When the Barak comes looking for Sisera, Jael shows him the dead body, and she is celebrated for giving the Israelites the victory over King Jabin. Both Deborah and Jael are celebrated in the poem of Judg 5.³

I & II Samuel

The books of I & II Samuel are located in the middle of the Deuteronomistic History and include the stories about Israel's development into a recognized nation on the Ancient Near Eastern stage. At the end of Judges, we are told that the Israelites did

³ Scholars call attention to the differences between the prose account of this military battle and the poetic version. This is one possible indication of different sources being brought together in the DH, and most agree that the poetic account is the oldest.

whatever they wanted because they had no king. This sets the stage for I Sam, in which the chief concern is Israel's move to a human ruler.

As I Samuel opens with the story of another barren woman. Like the matriarchs (i.e., Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, & Leah) before her, Hannah is a woman who has been unable to fulfill the most important role for a woman in Ancient Israel; she has not produced a child, more specifically a male child. In a story that resembles the saga of Rachel and Leah in their quest to give Jacob male heirs, Hannah is the first wife of Elkanah. As was permitted for a man whose wife was barren, Elkanah had taken a second wife, Peninah, who had provided him with many children. However, Elkanah loves Hannah, despite her infertility. The text says that he always gives her a double portion of each sacrifice and tries to comfort her with his words ("Am I not more to you than ten sons?" I Sam 1:8c), but this does nothing to assuage the Hannah's pain. Not only is she childless, but Peninah continually reminds her of that fact constantly. Tired of feeling powerless, Hannah confronts God and begs for one son. If the LORD grants her request, she promises to dedicate the child to the LORD's service. In due time, Hannah conceives and gives birth to son, whom she names "Samuel". When he is old enough, Hannah takes Samuel to the temple at Shiloh and leaves him there under the tutelage of the Eli, the priest. Given his divinely ordained birth, it is clear that God has a special purpose for Samuel, but that calling will not be answered easily.

In order to understand the story of Samuel (I Sam 3), we need to review the information provided in the preceding chapter. Eli had sons who were also priests and would take their father's position of "head priest" of Shiloh, when he died. However, these sons were not good men. They used their positions as religious leaders for their own gain, abusing the people's trust in their priesthood. Their behavior was so bad that the author of I Samuel declares: "Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord; for they treated the offerings of the Lord with contempt" (I Sam 2:17). It is clear that these men could not be allowed to continue in their sin, much less become head priests. No need to worry, though, because God has another plan.

Contrasted with Eli's sons is Samuel, who was "ministering before the Lord, a boy wearing a linen ephod" (I Sam 1:18).

Samuel paid close attention to his mentor, Eli, and served in the temple without any designs on gaining power. Since he was not a biological heir to the priesthood, Samuel had little chance of moving beyond his position as assistant to the priest. His dedication and innocence shows that he is more deserving of the priesthood than the "scoundrel" sons of Eli. In our text this week, after remaining silent for quite some time, God takes action to right the wrong direction that the religious leadership is heading.

As was his practice, Samuel was sleeping in the Shiloh temple, next to the Ark of the Covenant. Due to his advanced age and failing eyesight, Eli has retired to his room for the evening. This was not a night for sleeping, either for Samuel or Eli. In a rather comical scene, we watch as Samuel mistakes God's call for Eli's voice and this happens 3 times. For the first 2, both the young Samuel and the elderly Eli do not recognize what is happening. Samuel had never heard God's voice before, and Eli's blindness prevents him from discerning that it is the LORD who is calling to Samuel. When Samuel comes running to Eli the third time, the priest finally realizes what is going on. He tells Samuel to go and lay down in his spot. When the voice calls his name again, Samuel is to say: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (I Sam 3:9). He follows his mentor's instructions, so that when the LORD calls for the fourth time, Samuel responds appropriately. However, like other prophets who responded to God's call in the 1st Testament, the prophetic mission that God gives Samuel is not an easy one. He has the unpleasant task of delivering the news to Eli about the impending doom for him and his sons. This is just the first difficult task that Samuel must do.

As he grows up, it becomes clear that God has a special purpose for Samuel; he is to be priest, prophet, and judge of the tribes of Israel. Samuel serves as a transitional figure in Israel's first step of moving from a loose association of tribes to a recognized political entity. When the people ask Samuel to give them a king, like other nations, he

chastises them severely for rebelling against God as their only Ruler and rejecting Samuel's leadership, as well. However, God tells Samuel that the people shall have a king, if they still want one after being warned of what they will have to endure at the hands of a human ruler [e.g., the ruler will take their children to serve in the royal court, will demand the best of their crops/livestock to feed the political leadership, etc. (1 Sam 8)]. Despite this warning, the people still demand a king, so God sends Samuel to anoint Saul as the first king of Israel. As God's chosen king, Saul begins his reign with a bright future. Saul, though, is more of a military leader, similar to the judges, than a political leader. Most of his energy is focused on defeating Israel's enemies, specifically the Philistines. However, Saul makes two mistakes that reveal his lack of commitment to God and God's desires. At this point, the Divine Spirit departs Saul, and Samuel is sent to find the next king of Israel.

The character of David is introduced in the biblical text three different times. First, he appears on the scene when Saul anoints him as the new king. The next presentation of David occurs when he is described as a court musician, the only one who could soothe Saul's troubled soul. The final introduction of David, and probably the most popular, is his brave confrontation with Goliath. As just a young lad armed only with a slingshot, David is painted as a hero when he defeats his giant-sized enemy. After this, David shows up as one who served Saul loyally and as the intimate friend of Saul's son, Jonathon. When Saul determines David's presence to be a threat, the future king is forced to become a fugitive and only returns home after Saul's death. Under his leadership, Israel's borders are expanded and the various tribes are united. David was a military hero and a politically astute king, the latter was demonstrated by his decision to make Jerusalem (a strategically placed location) the capitol city and to relocate the Ark of the Covenant (the chief religious symbol of the Israelites) in Jerusalem.

II Samuel contains the "Court History" of King David. Included within these chapters are stories about the David's exploits as a man with almost absolute power. He is able to do what he wills and get what he wants. In many ways, David's reign begins to

bring the warnings about a human ruler into stark reality. One of the most immoral examples is the story of his rape of Batsheba and the arranged murder of her husband, to cover-up his misdeed. However, David learns that there is one more powerful than he – God. Despite his personal mistakes, David is blessed by God and considered in Israel to be the model of a “good” king. This legend is supported by the story of God’s special covenant with David and his descendants, found in II Sam 7. In a seemingly innocent and faithful move, David decides to build a “house” for God. When read with a “hermeneutic of suspicion”, we can also see this move by the king as a power play; his building a Temple for God would further solidify the linkage of the monarch and the Divine. [It is also a way of controlling God, by claiming that there was a physical structure in which God lives.] David consults his court prophet, Nathan, about his plans, and Nathan tells David to “just do it”.

However, the LORD does not support this plan and tells Nathan to break this bad news to the king. Essentially, God has seen through David’s feigned humility and faithfulness. The Divine reply rejects the notion that a human, particularly David, should dare to build a house for God. God give the king a brief history lesson about how God has done just fine without a house, managing to deliver the slaves from Egypt and secure a place for them to live. As a “consolation prize”, God offers David something that is of eternal significance. God makes a covenant with the king in which God promises to “make a house” for David, to establish a dynasty for him. With the Divine blessing, David is assured that one of his descendants will always sit on the throne in Jerusalem and that his son will build a Temple for God. This seems to satisfy the king. After David’s death, Solomon does rule as king and builds the Temple. Even when the kingdom splits, in the wake of Solomon’s harsh domestic policies, at his death, the Southern Kingdom of Judah still maintains the Davidic lineage on the throne. It is only with the Babylonian conquering of Judah, that this dynasty is broken. For the rest of the Hebrew Bible, there is no Davidic king ruling Jerusalem because the Jewish people are always ruled by a foreign power. So, what happened to the “Davidic Covenant”?

The story of David and the legend of his "greatness" is not based on either his ethical or political leadership. Rather, for the later Jewish community (in Exile and after the return from Babylon), the reign of David was a way of referring to an idealized "golden age" of Israel's history. It was a time when Israel was self-governed, and God smiled upon the city of Jerusalem. In order to firm up this "memory", the compilers of the Deuteronomistic History (who represented a "southern" perspective) used the idea of the Davidic Covenant to support their view of who should be in leadership, both political and religious (those who can trace their story back to David). Living under the oppressive government of the Greeks, an idea was born among some in the Jewish community that one day God would send "God's servant" (from the lineage of David) who would take back control of Jerusalem from the occupying forces and reestablish the Davidic reign and an independent Jewish state.

I & II Kings

The opening chapter of I Kings presents us with the picture of a dying King David and the struggles for who would succeed him on the throne. David's oldest living son, Adonijah, assumes that he will follow in his father's footsteps. He garners the support of Joab and Abiathar, but Adonijah does not court, nor receive, the support of Nathan, Zadok, and others of the Davidic administration and military. Meanwhile, Nathan and Bathsheba conspire together to secure the throne for Solomon. They inform the dying David of Adonijah's doings and convince him to declare Solomon as his successor. He does so in the presence of Nathan, Zadok, and Benaiah, who then go out to announce the declaration to the people. When faced with the overwhelming support for Solomon's kingship, Adonijah seeks the new king's forgiveness and gives up his bid for the throne. After David's death, Solomon overcomes some internal troubles and secures the kingdom. As part of the Davidic household, Solomon is the automatic recipient of divine graces as was promised in God's covenant with his father. When given the choice of anything he wants, the new king asks the LORD not for power or

wealth but for wisdom. The granting of this request is displayed in his handling of the request of two women to have Solomon determine who is the "real" mother of the boy.

Once he has his administrative officers in place, King Solomon's first task is to build the Temple, which his father had not been allowed to do. Using only the best resources and forced labor, he constructs a marvelous structure for the LORD as well as a grand palace and administrative complex. At the end of this approximately twenty year building process, Solomon presides over the dedication of the Temple in the presence of the people. Most of his regnal affairs involve trade alliances, usually secured through the marriage between Solomon and woman from the other nation. The kingdom of Israel enjoys a time of great prosperity and renown under his rule.

However, like his father, Solomon's time on the throne also experiences a downturn. His major downfall turns out to be Solomon's foreign wives, numbered at well over 1,000. According to the DH, these women enticed the king to turn away from the God of Israel and to worship other Gods. These actions enrage the LORD and are to be the root cause for the eventual split of the kingdom and its demise. Out of love and respect for David, the LORD delays the exacting of this punishment until after Solomon's lifetime. King Solomon, though, does suffer attacks from his enemies, resulting in the shrinking of the kingdom. In addition, an internal turmoil is developing. Jeroboam, the son of one of Solomon's servants, is unofficially anointed king of Israel by the prophet Ahijah. Due to Solomon's polytheism, Ahijah declares that the throne of Solomon will be reduced to one tribe for his successor and Jeroboam will reign over the rest of the tribes of Israel. When Solomon dies, Rehoboam, his son, inherits the kingdom. The people, having been oppressed by Solomon's forced labor and taxes for his building projects, are wary of what kind of ruler his successor intends to be. When asked, Rehoboam informs the people that he intended to be even more oppressive than Solomon had been. With this, the majority of the people rebel against Rehoboam and declare Jeroboam as their king. Neither ruler enjoyed a successful reign.

From this point on, the DH weaves together the contemporaneous histories of Israel and Judah, moving deftly between the northern kingdom to the southern one. Each person to ascend the throne of either kingdom is judged as either good or bad, based on the ruler's adherence to the LORD's commands, or lack thereof. For the northern kingdom, Israel, the overwhelming royal assessment is poor. The people of the northern kingdom are the unwitting victims of some divine confusion. Whereas Ahijah had described the succession of these tribes as being a divinely willed move, quickly the LORD's displeasure and wrath rests upon Israel. The reason for this, given by the biblical text, is because Jeroboam had built new places of worship at Dan and Bethel and erected two golden calves there. However, the tumultuous and short-lived experience of Israel might imply that God was unhappy with their rebellion.

The dual histories continue in II Kings, with the first eight chapters focusing primarily on Israel. The rotation becomes more balanced in chapter nine and continues a pattern of usually one northern ruler followed by two southern ones. The standard information given for each ruler includes: name and date of accession, age at accession (Judah only), length and place of reign, name of queen mother (Judah only), theological appraisal of reign, events during reign, formula citing other sources of information, notice of death and burial, and notice of successor.

Literary Parallels in Chronicles: Samuel and Kings are the only biblical texts which have another book covering the same historical period and information. The texts of Chronicles are often referred to as a "condensed" version of Samuel and Kings. These materials begin with Adam and quickly cover the early stories of Israel up until the rise of the monarchy. Beginning with the death of Saul, the story recounts the same basic events found in Samuel and Kings but with a different spin placed on the telling. Chronicles reveals an obvious interest and support for Judah and particularly for the Davidic dynasty. Stories found in Samuel and Kings, which make David and his descendants, look bad, are either omitted from the storyline in Chronicles or are told in a less condemning manner. The Temple and the Levites also gain primary importance

in Chronicles, which was not found in the DH. The author(s) of Chronicles also provide answer to questions left open in the DH (e.g., why did Manasseh, the worst king ever, reign for such a long time? Answer: According to Chr, he repented later in life for his sins and was granted a reprieve.). Although a comparison of Chronicles with Samuel and Kings can be a helpful interpretive exercise, most scholars would consider the events recounted in the DH to be more historically reliable (if any).

Theological Issues: It is obvious from reading the materials that the Deuteronomistic History was not compiled as an “objective” recounting of the history of Israel/Judah. This is a theological statement more than it is a historical report. Given Israel’s belief in a God active in human history, everything that happened to the people and/or nation was seen as divinely willed. With most scholars agreeing that Samuel and Kings were written after the events they claim to describe and perhaps even “predict,” one can see that the stories were written from hindsight. Knowing the end of the story made it easier for the biblical writers to “interpret” what had happened to them in light of what the people had done “right/wrong.” By recording their interpretations, these early historians were providing a record for future generations in hopes that they would not repeat the same “mistakes.”

What is important is not when the materials were written but how the people of Israel understood their history in light of the covenant they had made with God. As people called to be “a light unto the nations,” the Israelites held themselves to a high moral standard and were not afraid to admit when they had failed to live up to their covenantal promises. Although modern readers may not share the biblical authors’ view of a God directly active in human history, the notion of a faith community evaluating their lives through the eyes of covenantal faithfulness certainly holds potential for a more ethical world today.

Another theological issue faced within the DH is the texts’ premise of a reward/punishment life experience. The stories of Israel are remembered through eyes

that believed that one was punished for sin and rewarded for faithfulness. The broader theological scheme of the DH is one of unfaithfulness–punishment–repentance–forgiveness, which is continually repeated. In the face of much undeserved suffering in today’s world and the horrific acts of harm humanity has wrought upon humanity, such a simplistic worldview is hard to maintain. For example, can one say that a child born with a chronic illness has done something to deserve this “punishment”? Certainly this is not an assertion most people would want to make, so how can modern readers still appreciate such a “reap what you sow” presentation of Israel’s story as scriptural? The same struggles were also present in Ancient Israel. The presence of biblical texts, such as Job and Ecclesiastes, indicates that not every Israelite agreed with the reward/punishment interpretation of life. Perhaps, though, one can read these stories and understand their worldview as a result of again a people bound in covenantal relationship with their God. If one lives as if every act is important to God and the community, then one is less likely to cause harm. When faced with tragic and unjustified suffering, even the biblical writers were left uncertain.

Summary: The books of Joshua through Kings provide a readable, though at times tedious, recounting of the events in Israel’s story with God, which the biblical authors deemed formative for the people’s self-identity. For the modern reader, this “history” is enlivened by stories of sex, murder, intrigue, tragedy, and triumph. A contemporary soap opera or TV drama has nothing on the DH. The common thread which knits these various genres and characters is the belief by the people of Israel in a God who cares about humanity and the whole of creation. The stories were remembered, recorded, and passed-down by a faith community committed to continue the struggle of living in right relationship with their God.