Irish Biblical Studies: Issue 2: April, 1980

A.D.H.Mayes: Exposition of Deuteronomy 4: 25-31

The Text

25. When you beget children and children's children,
and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly
by making a graven image in the form of anything,
and by doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord
26. your God, so as to provoke him to anger, I call
heaven and earth to witness against you this day,
that you will soon utterly perish from the land
which you are going over the Jordan to possess;
you will not live long upon it, but will be utterly
27. destroyed. And the Lord will scatter you among
the peoples, and you will be left few in number
among the nations where the Lord shall drive you.
28. And there you will serve gods of wood and stone,
the work of men's hands, that neither see, nor
29. hear, nor eat, nor smell. But from there you will
seek the Lord your God, and you will find him, if
you search after him with all your heart and with
30. all your soul. When you are in tribulation, and
all these things come upon you in the latter days,
you will return to the Lord your God and obey his
31. voice, for the Lord your God is a merciful God;
he will not fail you or destroy you or forget the
covenant with your fathers which he swore to them.

A. Context, background and theme

(i) Literary context and general background

Deuteronomy 4: 1-40 is a single long sermon which belongs to a fairly identifiable time and is addressed to a fairly clearly definable group of people. /1/ It begins in vs 1 with a phrase "And now" ("And now, O Israel, give heed to the statutes .....") which marks off what follows as distinct from and yet dependent on what precedes. The author turns from the subject of the previous chapters to

draw out in what follows the implications of what he has been saying. The preceding chapters have been a review of Israel's history up to the present: Israel encamped in Moab on the eve of her crossing the Jordan to go in and take possession of the land. Now the author turns to a consideration of what Israel's behaviour should be, particularly once she enters the land, and constantly alludes to historical events, and draws lessons from history which have a bearing on her behaviour.

Despite the impression thus given that 4:1-40 stands in an original relationship with what precedes, it must be emphasized that in fact chs 1-3 have been secondarily extended through the addition of 4:1-40. The historical account of chs 1-3 is not related with a view to convincing Israel that she should obey the law, which is the purpose which 4:1-40 presupposes in what precedes. Rather, chs 1-3 are a straightforward account which picks up again towards the end of the book of Deuteronomy, and then continues into the following book of Joshua where the fulfilment of the task for which Moses in Deut 31 commissioned Joshua is related. In fact, Deut 1-3 is the introduction to the so-called deuteronomistic history which extends from Deuteronomy to the end of II Kings, a comprehensive account of Israel from its point of entry into the land of Canaan to its expulsion from that land. The connection between Deut 1-3 and 4:1-40 is, therefore, quite artificial. This is confirmed by the observation that the elements of Israel's history which are referred to in 4:1-40 in order to motivate obedience to the law(the events at Baal-Peor, v. 3; the theophany at Horeb, vv 9-14, 33, 36: the exodus, vv 20,34,37) are not mentioned in the previous chapters.

But if the connection is secondary, it is also the case that 4:1-40 presupposes the presence of chs 1-3 in the use of the connecting phrase "and now"; it is, therefore, later than , and was composed for this context. The deuteronomistic history to which chs 1-3 belong was written, however, during the exile: the last event to which reference is made, in II Kings 25:27, is the release of the Judaean king Jehoiachin from prison in exile. /2/ So this marks the earliest possible date for the composition of 4:1-40 also.

The sermon in these verses was composed for a late exilic period, and is addressed to an audience which has had first hand experience of the horrors of siege, death, destruction and exile. /3/ Terrible as the purely physical conditions of their experience had been, they were exacerbated by the spiritual and theological implications of the events which brought these experiences. The destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, and the exile of the people from their land, had profound consequences for a faith which was so intimately bound up with the land of Palestine. This land of promise had been bestowed on Israel on the basis of God's covenant with the patriarchs, and Israel's knowledge of God and worship of God were intimately connected with her possession of that land. Even if popular faith did not always hold to the idea of a quasi-physical relationship of God to the land (such as is presupposed in 1 Sam 26:19 and II Kings 5:17), it is still true that faith in the God of Israel could barely be expressed without reference to the land as the gift of God to his people. /4/

The consequences for faith of loss of land were serious: at best it meant that God had brought his relationship with his people to an end; at worst it signalled the victory of the gods of the nations over the God of Israel. In any case it signified for Israel the complete loss of all that gave meaning, stability and security to her life and faith. When the prophet of the exile, Second Isaiah, responded to the call of God to the prophetic office, by saying "all flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field" (Isa.40:6), he only echoes what must have been the general mood of his people in exile who had experienced this loss: there is no point, all is transitory, there is nothing anymore which gives stability and endurance and meaning to life.

It is this mood of hopelessness that both prophets and deuteronomistic writers seek to counter. Second Isaiah received as a reply to his objection to his call the affirmation "The grass withers, the flower fades: but the word of our God will stand for ever". The security of land possession, the stability of nationhood, these are indeed illusions; what is enduring and secure in the word of God alone. In order to make a similar point, the deuteronomistic

historian in the prayer of Solomon in 1 Kings 8 denies that God can be restricted to the land of Judah or the temple in Jerusalem (v.27), and proclaims that even in exile in a foreign land the people of God may repent and make supplication to God and will be heard (vv 46-53). This word of God - what is it? This repentance of the people in exile - how is it to be expressed? It is for concrete guidance to a people despairing of the future, broken in spirit and weak in faith that our exilic preacher has composed a sermon preserved in Deut 4: 1-40.

(ii) Responsibility before the law in Deut 4: 1-40

These verses bear all the marks of a sermon: simplicity, directness, urgency; it is a sermon full of exhortation and encouragement, backed up and strengthened by warnings and threats. Obedience to the law in general is its concern, but particular emphasis is laid on the second commandment of the decalogue, the prohibition of making images. This commandment is in fact the chief concern of the whole passage (see vv 12,15-18,23,25,28) within the context of its overall concern for observance of the law in general.

The impact of the chapter and the urgency of its exhortation are reinforced by the regular appearance of formulaic language which has a powerful cumulative effect: the verb 'command' with either God or Moses as subject is used with reference to the commandments in vv 2,5,13,14,23, 40. It was in the context of the covenant making at Horeb that Moses received from God the commands which he is to deliver to the people. This basic covenant making event is referred to on three occasions, in vv 12,15,33, while its counterpart, God's merciful and gracious deliverance of his people from bondage in Egypt, likewise receives a threefold reference (vv 20,34,37).

The present generation has a particular responsibility with regard to obedience to the law, for it is they who have witnessed the very things which demonstrate the reality of God and are the foundation of the demand which he makes on his people ('your eyes have seen', vv 3,9; 'before your eyes' v.34). This responsibility extends, moreover, to future generations: children must be taught the divine demand which comes with membership in the

people of God (vv 9,10,25,40; indeed the transmission of the faith to the children is a theme of considerable significance in Deuteronomy; cf.also 6:7; 11:19 /5/)

The purpose of all this is the enjoyment of life in the land which God gives to Israel. Sometimes obedience to the law is presented as the condition of entering the land at all (as in 4:1). Elsewhere we find that it is in the land that the law is to be obeyed(as in 6:1,10ff.). These are not two quite different views; basic to both is that obedience to the law of God is necessary for life (see 4:4), but 'life' for Israel usually means living in the land (see 4:26,40). The land, living in the land, possession of the land - this is the very sign of life with God. It is the land of promise, a promise made to the fathers of Israel that their descendants would one day possess the land. The land is, therefore, the gift of God to Israel, but a gift which can be appropriated and enjoyed only in obedience to the law of God. It is referred to in intimate association with the law throughout the chapter (see vv 1,5,14,21-23,26,38-40): Israel's possession of the land is the very expression of her status as the elect people of God.

(iii) The sin of Israel and its consequences

Vv 25-31 of Deut 4 stand at the very heart of the sermon and express <u>in nuce</u> its dominant theme: sin brings punishment, but punishment may, after repentance, be succeeded by restoration.

(a) Sin

Many of the English Versions (such as RSV and NEB) in their translations of v.25 state the sin as simply that of making a graven image: "When you beget children and children's children and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a graven image.....". However more accurate are the AV and RV translations: "When thou shalt beget children and children's children, and ye shall have been long in the land, and shall corrupt yourselves, and make a graven image.....". Here the making of a graven image is clearly the symptom of a deeper corruption rather than being the sin in itself. This corruption is what follows on having "been long in the land" (RV)

or "grown old in the land" (RSV), a phrase which uses a verb otherwise appearing in Lev.26:10 and Song of Solomon 7:13. In these passages the idea of staleness is present, and it is that which clearly indicates what is in the mind of the writer here. Long familiarity with the benefits of the land, automatic acceptance of its fruit and prosperity, will lead to forgetfulness of the fact that it is to God and to God alone that thankfulness for these things is constantly due: "Take heed.....lest, when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God.....Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth' ". This quotation, from Deut 8:11-17 then goes on immediately to warn against going after other gods to serve and worship them; and it is just this connection which lies also in Deut 4:25 - "growing old" in the land is the very basis of apostasy.

It is true that Deut 4 is concerned particularly with making graven images rather than generally with apostasy, and that since this prohibition is anchored in the fact that Israel "saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb" (v.15) it is images of Israel's God which are intended. Yet the author of this sermon does not stop short at thinking that the worship of an image is just another (though prohibited) form of worship of God. That an image should embody the divine presence makes the divine presence subject to human use, to human manipulation; in effect it makes the divine presence something which is quite alien to the nature of God. The sovereign freedom of God the Creator, as described for example in 4:32-36, is absolutely incompatible with the notion of the divine presence contained in an image. The worship of an image is, therefore, the worship of something which is not God and so is apostasy. /6/ Apostasy is the chief prohibition; its precise form may change from generation to generation, from culture to culture, but its basic character remains the same: it is the worship of that which is not God. /7/

(b) Punishment

The punishment with which a disobedient people is here threatened is destruction and exile. This gains a peculiar poignancy when read against the background of the time and audience to which the words are addressed. Judah and Jerusalem had experienced just this in their immediate past. In effect the whole of Israel's history is here interpreted as a time when through confident appropriation to her own use of the gifts of God she has forgotten the true source of her life and prosperity and brought upon herself the destructive consequences of apostasy. Her present state of expulsion from the land, of being few in number, of being scattered among the nations, is the very outworking of the curse which results from disobedience to covenant law. Her covenant with God at Sinai had brought liberation from Egypt, land and growth; that these blessings should now be reversed is a sign of the dissolution of that covenant.

Exile was a common feature of foreign policy on the part of ancient near eastern nations in their wars of conquest. Through scattering their defeated enemies throughout the different lands of their empires, they minimized the possibility of organized and unified revolt on the part of any particular subject state. It is a punishment frequently threatened, moreover, in the curses of vassal treaty texts as a possible consequence of the vassal's refusal to obey the treaty stipulations. Here Israel's misfortune is not the result of destructive attack by another nation: rather it is her own God who has cut off his people. That even this should be ascribed to the will and work of God represents a fundamental transformation in the early popular notion of what is meant to be a member of the people of God. This is a God whose judgment and punishment are directed not only at those with whom his people are at war, but (and even primarily) at that very people who call themselves the elect people of God.

(c) Repentance and restoration

Yet this is not the end. The deuteronomistic history, into the context of which this sermon has been set, has often been interpreted as providing a complete account of Israel's history, seen as having been brought

to an absolute end through Israel's sin; no hope can be held out for the future. Israel's exile meant the end of her covenant with God, an end fully deserved as the result of continuous provocation throughout her history; all opportunities for reform had been given, and there can now be no return to her former status as an elect people. This bleak presentation is certainly justified by the dominant portrayal of Israel's history by the deuteronomistic historian as a time of turning away from God resulting in punishment (see, for example, the summary characterization of the history of the immediate post-settlement period in Judges 2: 6-23). Deut 4:29-31 is one passage which brings a glimmer of relief to this portrait: even in exile Israel may return with confidence to God. /8/. The basis of this assurance is not spelt out in detail. But one significant point is made; God will not forget the covenant which he made with the patriarchs. Israel's future will find its theological basis not on the old Sinai covenant which has been nullified through sin, but in the even older patriarchal covenant. /9/ This was a covenant of promise which included two major elements: that the descendants of the patriarchs should be a great nation and that they should possess the land of Palestine (cf.Gen.15). In the fulfilment of these two promises the curses which breach of the Sinaitic covenant brought will be reversed: instead of being scattered Israel will be gathered from the nations; instead of being few in number she will be "more prosperous and numerous than your fathers"; instead of perishing from the land she will be brought into the land.

8. Israel as the covenant people of God

(i) Covenant in the OT

The nature and significance of the shift in understanding which is implied in this affirmation of hope despite sin and destruction can really be appreciated only after a fuller consideration of covenant in the OT. The book of Deuteronomy is particularly important here because although the belief that Israel stands in a covenant relationship with God probably has pre-deuteronomic roots it is in Deuteronomy that this category is emphasized, practically to the exclusion of all others. /10/ The prophets used

the analogy of the relationship between a bride and her husband, or between a father and son; with Deuteronomy it is as a covenant relationship that Israel's relationship with her God is described. In this way the author best felt able to express the view that God's election of Israel laid on the people certain moral and religious obligations. Covenants or contracts were already well known and widely used forms by which relationships between individuals and between nations were expressed (cf.Gen 31:44 for the covenant between Jacob and Laban; and 1 Kings 5:12 for the covenant between Israel and Tyre). In Deuteronomy this form is adopted to express the relationship between God and Israel.

There is an important aspect of the adoption of this form which deserves emphasis. It has become increasingly clear from the steady stream of research on the subject over many years that the forms of international treaties, particularly those which regulated relations between suzerains and their vassals, have deeply influenced the OT presentation of Israel's covenant with God. The Hittite treaties with their characteristic didactic use of history as a means of persuading the vassal to obey the treaty stipulations, and the later Assyrian treaties with their characteristic long and explicit curses intended to terrify the vassal into a state of compliance, have both left their imprint in the OT. Once again, as with the covenant theme, it is in Deuteronomy, and in texts such as Joshua 24 which reveal the distinctive style and thought of circles to which we owe Deuteronomy, that the influence of the treaties is most obvious. /11/

The command that Israel should love God with all her heart, soul and might (Deut 6:4) is paralleled by the treaty demand that the vassal should love his suzerain, and means that Israel/the vassal should be faithful and loyal to God/the suzerain; in Deut 8:2-6 (and frequently elsewhere), where history is used in a didactic way to teach lessons for the present, the parenetic or preaching style may be stronger than anything found in the treaties, but the historical prologue in the Hittite treaty texts in principle serves the same

function of introducing and supplying a basis for the demand which follows; the verb "know" is used in Deut 9:24; 11:28; 13:2 in a sense familiar from the treaties: the mutual legal recognition of a suzerain and his vassal; the series of verbs used in Deut 13:4 (walk after, fear, obey his voice, serve, cleave) all have a background in the vocabulary of the treaties, expressing a concern for the vassal's right attitude towards his suzerain; in Deut 28 many direct parallels may be drawn with the curse sections of the Assyrian treaty texts, and it is possible even that in some parts of the chapter only direct dependence on these extra-biblical curses can explain the peculiar content and the particular order in which these curses appear. /12/

But aside from such detailed points of contact there is also an impressive parallel in general structure between Deuteronomy with its succession of parenetic history (chs 5-11), laws (chs 12-26) and blessing-curse (chs 27-28) and the overall structure of extra-biblical treaty texts. Outside these central chapters, in the framework, to which 4:1-40 belongs, the influence of the extra-biblical treaties is also clear. Even where there is no question of a treaty or covenant text being present as in Deut 4:1-40, this influence is present. This chapter is a speech or sermon which is informed by treaty forms and terminology, but which remains a speech or sermon.

(ii) The expression of Israel's covenant faith

Deut 4:1-40 can be broken down into a number of sections, each of which begins with a warning to obey the law, a warning which is then reinforced through reference to history. This is not to say that these are originally separate units: all of them in fact together constitute a single form in which, though particularly in vv 9-31, the influence of the near eastern treaty form is significant. The mixture of exhortation and historical allusion in vv 9-14 leads up to and lays the foundation for the prohibition of making images vv 15-24. This is then rounded off and completed by the curse and blessing in

vv 25-31. That pattern, the succession of history, law, curse and blessing, is quite typical of the treaties.

These treaties were legal forms, and there was an obvious danger in the use of them in this religious context. This consisted in the clear possibility that the faith of Israel would become dominated by legalism. That would find its expression in the belief that one could remain a member only by such obedience and that obedience and disobedience would be accompanied by appropriate rewards and punishments. In such a system God is reduced to the level of man; there is little if any room for the grace of God, for repentance and forgiveness of sin; all emphasis effectively lies on the efforts of man himself to work out his own salvation.

Yet the OT, and Deuteronomy in particular, has gone some considerable way towards guarding against this legalistic influence. /13/ It is true that in several ways the immanence of God is forcibly expressed: for example, Deut 4:7 declares that there is no other nation "that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him"; the epithets by which God can be described - Jealous (4:24), merciful (4:31); great and terrible (7:21), faithful (7:9) - necessarily endow God with qualities that can only be understood in a very human way; the declaration that God has caused his name to dwell at a particular sanctuary (as in 12:5) also expresses the idea of God's dwelling among his people. Yet, on the other hand, God's transcendence is safeguarded equally strongly. /14/ Deut 4:36 will not have God on earth, only his voice is heard out of the midst of the fire while he himself remains in heaven; in 10:14 not only the earth but the heavens and the heaven of heavens belong to God; the sacred ark, long understood as the throne or pedestal of the invisible God living among his people (cf.Num.10.35f.) is now no more than a box in which the tablets of the law are kept (Deut 10:1-5); sacrifice, which could so easily be understood as a means by which an angry god might be propitiated, is indeed permitted, though its function is strictly controlled: it may have a place as an expression of gratitude to God in the fulfilment of vows (Deut 12.6), but its chief use is that it may be shared with the deprived elements of society,

the poor, the Levite, the stranger, the orphan and the widow (Deut 12:11f). Throughout Deuteronomy there is a very strong tendency towards a spiritualizing of life, in the sense that the divine is freed from the control of man, the action of man in sacrifice, prayer and confession, can no longer be the means by which the divine may be made to conform to the wishes of the worshipper but must only be an expression of a right attitude towards God on the part of the worshipper.

That the relationship between God and Israel is not dependent simply on human effort is made clear in several ways. Chief among these is the general OT presentation of the exodus from Egypt as an act of grace on the part of God which takes place before any demand is made. It is in that primary event that Israel became the elect people of God. This was on the basis not of any merit of her own, either of power or righteousness, but solely the quite undeserved favour of God. It is not, therefore, by Israel's effort that she becomes the people of God; it is only by the initiative of God himself that this relationship is established, and only then is a demand laid on this people. Deut 27:9-10 expresses this concisely and clearly: "this day you have become the people of the Lord your God. You shall therefore obey the voice of the Lord your God". By this means both the freedom and the initiative of God are preserved.

At the other end the freedom of God is maintained. The treaties sometimes explicitly indicate that if the vassal is obedient then the suzerain will protect him, assure him and his successors of the throne and so on. In Deut 9:4ff. the idea that God might be under obligation to Israel is rejected, firstly, through the assertion that it is not because of Israel's righteousness that she is being given the land, but rather because of the unrighteousness of the nations, and secondly, through the reference to the oath sworn to the patriarchs. It is in fulfilment of his promise to the patriarchs that God is giving Israel the land, not by reason of any faithfulness on Israel's part (see also 4:31).

(iii) Breach of covenant and divine forgiveness

That Israel should by her own effort of will obey the law and be pleasing to God would have been seen by the author of Deut 4 as out of question. Despite his constant warnings against disobedience, which seem to presuppose that he does think in terms of Israel being able to obey, his description of what is to happen in vv 25-31 accepts the future disobedience and punishment of the people as quite inevitable. Yet the author has not taken the way of Jeremiah 31, where Israel's ultimate ability to obey is seen to be the result of God's giving her a new heart on which his law will be written; rather, his concern for the sovereignty and freedom of God, his concern too for the place of repentance and divine forgiveness in man's relations with God, lead him to posit a different way by which God and man might remain together despite man's absolute inability to comply with the way of behaviour which God requires.

It is this which has involved modification of the extra-biblical treaty structure, removing an important aspect of its legal expression, a modification which is apparent in the verses of Deut 4 with which we are here concerned. While the treaty form presented curse and blessing as alternative possibilities following on disobedience and obedience to the law, in Deut 4:25-31 this is no longer the case. Curse and blessing are preserved, but not as alternate possibilities; rather, they are successive events which are connected by repentance and forgiveness. /15/ Breach of covenant no longer implies the absolute end of the covenant relationship; through repentance there will be forgiveness and the establishment of a new relationship.

There are fundamental modifications which have transformed a legal form into a means by which divine transcendence and freedom, human repentance and divine forgiveness, might become essential features of the understanding and expression of a relationship between God and Israel, which has its beginning and end in an unmerited act of divine love.

8. Restoration and renewal

In the establishment of a new relationship when the old covenant has been broken, it is not simply a matter of Israel's being forgiven so that things may return to their former state. Rather, this is something wholly new. The former state cannot be restored since its theological basis is utterly destroyed; it must be a quite new foundation on which the Israel of the future will be built. The precise implications of this are not set out in detail by Deuteronomy; but the writer here is nevertheless representative of a certain theological conviction which does find more detailed expression elsewhere in the OT among his near contemporaries. Important here is Jer 31:31-34, a passage which, taking full and serious account of the fact that the old covenant made at Sinai is now broken, promises a new covenant which while requiring Israel's obedience to the divine law, will nevertheless be dependent throughout on the divine initiative. The quality and reliability of Israel's own effort in this context have already been seen to be completely defective; so now it is God himself who will through his grace enable Israel to obey the law of her covenant relationship with her God.

While the author of Deut 4:25-31 does not give this precise expression to his understanding of the new relationship between God and Israel, his view lays no less emphasis on the basic significance of the divine initiative in the establishment and maintenance of this relationship. The old covenant of Horeb is at an end; the new relationship cannot be based on that. Yet there remains an older covenant than that concluded at Horeb, and it is to this that the author appeals. This is the covenant with the fathers: the promise made to Abraham, and renewed to Isaac and Jacob, that their descendants would be many and would possess the land. Through appeal to this ancient covenant, the author can, while maintaining these essential features of divine sovereignty and freedom, also proclaim: despite your utter faithlessness, despite your total failure in living the life of a people chosen by God, the mercy of God, the forgiveness of God and the love of God are constant and unchanging. To a dejected and scattered people, convinced of its rejection, this proclamation

offered the only possible basis for life.

Notes

1. The most recent detailed work on this passage is that of G. Braulik, Die Mittel deuteronomischer Rhetorik, Analecta Biblica 68, Rome 1978. Particularly for the exposition of the chapter reference should also be made to N.Lohfink, Höre Israel. Auslegung von Texten aus dem Buch Deuteronium, Dusseldorf 1965, 90ff

2. This is the view of the classic work on the subject, M.Noth, Ueberlieferungsgeschichte Studien^2, Tuebingen 1957, 12. Some modification of Noth's detailed presentation, particularly with regard to the unity of the work, is probably necessary, but this does not substantially affect the major point at issue here.

3. That the audience is a post-exilic one is possible but unlikely. There is no indication that the exile is over; restoration is held out as a possibility for the future dependent on repentance and obedience. The background is the same as that of Second Isaiah, with whom the author of Deut 4:1-40 has many contacts. See my Deuteronomy (New Century Bible), London 1979, in loc.

4. For an extensive theological presentation of the subject of land in the Bible, which sees this as a particularly important theological theme also in modern American cultural conditions, cf. W. Brueggemann, The Land, London 1978.

5. The connection between this instruction and the wisdom setting of the teacher instructing his pupil has been discussed by J.W.McKay, "Man's love for God in Deuteronomy and the Father/Teacher-Son/Pupil Relationship", VT 22, 1972, 432ff.

6. Cf. Lohfink, Höre Israel, 107

7. On the antiquity of the idea of the chief commandment, cf. Lohfink, The Christian Meaning of the Old Testament, London 1969, 87ff

8. It has already been noted that Deut 4: 1-40 is

not an original part of the deuteronomistic history to which Deut 1-3 is the introduction. That it is to the second edition of the deuteronomistic history, to which Deut 4:1-40 may be assigned, that all those passages which express hope for the future belong, is possible; the answer depends on an extensive literary-critical treatment of the whole deuteronomistic history. For a short treatment of the subject in relation to Deuteronomy, cf. my Deuteronomy, 41ff.

9. In this emphasis on the covenant with the patriarchs, it is possible that a close connection should be seen to exist between this chapter and the priestly writing of the Pentateuch. For this account provides no version of the Sinaitic covenant, parallel to the JE account, but instead in Gen.17 emphasizes the covenant between God and Abraham. The priestly writing, written for an audience struggling with the difficulties and disappointments of the first years after the release from exile, was, like Deut.4, aimed at providing a new theological self-understanding for a community for which the old Sinaitic covenant was no longer relevant, cf. R.C.Clements, Abraham and David. Genesis 15 and its meaning for Israelite Tradition, London 1967, pp 74ff.

10. For a fuller consideration of this, with bibliographical references cf. my Deuteronomy, 60ff.

11. See especially the comprehensive works of M. Weinfeld, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School, Oxford 1972; and D.J. McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant , Analecta Biblica 21, Rome 1978.

12. Cf. Weinfeld, "Traces of Assyrian Treaty Formulae in Deuteronomy", Bib 41, 1960, 420ff.

13. Cf. Lohfink, "Die Wandlung des Bundesbegriffs im Buch Deuteronomium", Gott in Welt (Festgabe für Karl Rahner), edited by H. Vorgrimler, vol.1, Freiburg 1964, 423ff.

14. Cf. Clements, God and Temple, Oxford 1965, 88ff

15. This is also the case in Deut. 30:1ff.; this

passage also has close links with Jer 31, in its view that Israel will experience a change of heart, effected by God, which will enable her to obey the law.

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