

# The People of God in the Deuteronomistic Tradition

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## 1. Historical Context and Redaction-history<sup>1</sup>

In 1805 A.D., W. L. M. de Wette suggested that the Book of the Law which had been found in the temple at Jerusalem (622 B.C.) and on which King Josiah had based his religious reform was in fact the Deuteronomistic Code. Undoubtedly, there are remarkable resemblances between 2 Kings 23 and the Book of Deuteronomy. Notice the following common topics:

(i) Centralization of the Cult:	2 Kings 23: 8f., 19	Deut. 12:13-18
(ii) Proscription of astral worship:	23: 11f.	17:3
(iii) Dismissal of temple prostitutes:	23: 7	23:18
(iv) No spiritism, scrcery, soothsaying:	23:24	18:11f.
(v) No sacrifice of children:	23:10	18:10
(vi) Observance of the Passover:	23:21-23	16:1-8

Ever since the publication of this dissertation, scholars have tried in different ways to trace the origin and background of the Deuteronomistic school.

The form-critics, e.g., A. Alt, G. von Rad and A. Welch, pointed out that the religious instructions of Deuteronomy contained much older traditions which probably came from the northern kingdom.

M. Noth's great contribution was the realization that the fifth book of the Pentateuch should be considered as the first volume of a great historical work which is now found in Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. He distinguished between an older section, "Ur-deuteronomium," 4:40-28:68, and the redactional work of a later historian, 1:6-3:29 and 31:1-3 etc., and attributed a few later additions to the compiler of the whole Pentateuch JEDP, 32:48-52 and 34:2a, 7-9, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> For the first two sections, on the Book of Deuteronomy, I have followed very closely the excellent Dutch introduction and commentary of Dr. J. N. Wijngaards: 'Deuteronomium', *De Boeken van het Oud Testament*, 111/2, J.J. Romen and Zonen, Roermond, 1971. Biblical references cited are from the Book of Deuteronomy, unless otherwise indicated.

Already at the beginning of this century A. Klosterman (1907) had analysed the style of the Deuteronomist, but more recently N. Lohfink has proceeded further along the same line and successfully demonstrated that some sections, which were previously thought to be compilations of heterogeneous elements, should be considered as stylistic units purposely selected and structured. In fact, some detailed studies confirm that Deuteronomy follows the pattern of the Hittite "vassal-overlord" covenant described by E. Bikermann, G. Mendenhall, K. Baltzer, D. J. McCarthy and others.

In spite of all these valuable contributions, no final agreement has as yet been reached regarding the time and place of redaction. At the risk of over-simplification one can distinguish with J. N. Wijngaards four different solutions:

(i) The Deuteronomistic code comes from the North and was greatly influenced by the preaching of the Levites of the eighth and seventh centuries: e.g., G. E. Wright, P. Buis, J. Leclercq.

(ii) It is the work of Jerusalem's religious leaders, during the last decades preceding the exile: e.g., O. Eächli, H. Cazelles, E. W. Nicholson, M. Weinfeld.

(iii) According to G. Fohrer and others, the greater part of Deuteronomy is to be dated after the exile.

(iv) A more recent approach is to go much further back to the pre-monarchical period for the whole of Deuteronomy (thus M. G. Kline) or at least for the nucleus of the Covenant Code (e.g. J. L'Hoir and N. Lohfink). O. Eissfeldt, W.F. Albright and P. Skehan consider only the Song of the Covenant, 32:1-43, as pre-monarchical.

As a working hypothesis we shall follow the suggestion of Dr. J. N. Wijngaards:

(i) The earlier core, the central section of Deuteronomy, comes from the time of the Judges and is connected with the covenant at Shechem. It comprises:

(a) the homiletic portion: 5:1-11:32

(b) the Deuteronomistic Code: 12:1-26:19

(c) the ceremony of Covenant Renewal: 27:1-28:68

(d) the injunction to read the Law regularly: 31:9-13

(e) the Song of the Covenant: 32:1-43

(ii) A later school which preserved these traditions made use of this "Ur-Deuteronomium" to write the great historical work Deuteronomy—2 Kings. A first edition can be dated before 840 B.C. because 2:9 and 3:12 presuppose that the northern part of Moab still belongs to the tribe of Reuben. Moab reconquered it in that year. Other passages like 4:1-40 and 29:1-30:20 were probably added before King Josiah. To these Deuteronomistic historians we can attribute most of chh. 1-4, Moses' introductory discourse, and the greater part of chh. 28-32 in which the leadership is handed over to Joshua (31:9-13 and 32:1-43 already existed).

(iii) The final redactor of the Pentateuch, JEDP, added only a few connecting lines or some necessary information, around 400 B.C.: e.g., the date of Moses' discourse in 1:3; ethnological annotations in 2:10-12, 20-23 and 3:9, 11; the announcing of Moses' death in 32:48-52 and the conclusion 34:1a, 7-9.

## 2. The Community of Israel in the Ur-Deuteronomium: Socio-political and religious data

Before the monarchy—and therefore before the divided kingdom—Israel was a “confederation” of tribes, a commonwealth or “congregation” of ethnic groups who gathered at regular intervals to “hear” the word of God; to realize their responsibility for “purging evil from their midst” so that the whole of Israel might be imbued with a salutary “fear of YHWH” (cf. 5:1; 13:6; 21:21).

The period of the Holy War was not yet over (20:1-7). The whole of Canaan was not yet conquered and some of the nations had still to be “dispossessed” (7:1, 17) or “dedicated to the Lord,” that is exterminated by the *ḥērem* (7:2; 20:16f.). No friendly alliance was permitted with the Ammonites and Moabites (23:6).<sup>2</sup> The Amalekites had not yet been wiped out by Saul (25:17-19). Transjordan was not yet annexed: the Jordan was the eastern boundary and it was by crossing this river that one entered the promised land (9:1, 3; 11:31; also 6:1; 11:11).<sup>3</sup>

Politically, there was no central power, but every one did what was right in his own eyes (Judg. 17:6; 21:25). The judiciary was organized on a local basis: justice was dispensed at the gates where the elders gave their verdict (Judg. 21:16). At times these were assisted by specially appointed judges who were acquainted with the traditional norms and the execution was entrusted to selected “officers” (Judg. 5:1; 16: 18-20). Usually it was to settle a dispute, *rib*, between two parties of whom one had to be declared “right” and the other “wrong” (25:1; 17:8).<sup>4</sup> Most of the cases occurring in 12:11-26:68 have been adapted from Canaanite practices but in doubtful ones, when there was no precedent, the priest was asked to give a verdict in the form of an oracle, that is *torah* (17:9-11); before this he might have consulted YHWH by the Urim and Thummim (33:8).

<sup>2</sup> The expression “to seek their peace and prosperity” (23:6) means to contract a friendly alliance with them. Cf. J. A. Fitzmyer, *Biblica* 64, 1965, pp. 52-54.

<sup>3</sup> In his Dutch translation J. N. Wijngaards renders 11:24 as “from the desert (South) to the river Euphrates (North) and (West) to the Mediterranean Sea.” Later on Lebanon was added, when people no longer realized that the eastern boundary, i.e. the Jordan was taken for granted: cf. Gen. 15:18; 1 Kings 5:1; 2 Kings 24:7; also Num. 13:17-29; 34:3-12; Ezek. 47: 13-20.

<sup>4</sup> J. N. Wijngaards interprets the case in 17:8 which are *ultra vires* as a reciprocal demand for capital punishment, or for restitution of property, or some kind of damage done to the other party.

The new legislation would then be incorporated into the code when the next public reading of the law would take place at the central shrine, that is every seventh year.

Society consisted mainly of small farmers who owned their hereditary plot of land (19:14 and 21:16). Their main concern was the harvest and the fertility of the cattle (7:13f.; 11:14f.; 28:4f.). Their greatest temptation was therefore the fertility cult of the Canaanites (26:12-15). The household included also the servants and the marginal people who were not blood-related but were circumcised and could therefore take part in the religious festivities (16:11).

In normal circumstances a man had contacts with his fellow-Israelites, i.e., his "brother" (22:1-4 and 23:8); his close neighbour, i.e., his "friend" (15:2 and the more ancient texts?); the non-Israelite who had settled there and had his domicile, i.e., the *ger* or "alien"; and the itinerant passer-by, i.e., the *nokri* or "foreigner" (14:21). He hired labourers on the basis of daily wages (15:18; 24:14f.), but could have bondsmen and even perpetual slaves (15:12-17).

Three times a year, all men of Israel went to the central sanctuary to seek "the face of YHWH": at the Feast of the Unleavened Bread (the Passover), the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) and the Feast of Booths, at the very end of the vintage harvest (16:16). At the sanctuary there was a sacrificial meal (12:7) and the Levites functioned as priests: they offered the oblations and were therefore entitled to a sacred portion (18:1-8). They were also entrusted with the teaching of the Law (30:10).

As to the origin of these traditions, it is obvious that many of them were borrowed and adapted from Canaanite practices, for example, the three pilgrimages each year, the dues to the priests, the tithes (14:22 and 26:12-15), the process of reconciliation when a murderer cannot be traced (21:1-9) and the offering of the first-born (15:19-23).

But before being taken over, some traditions had first to be purified of their magic elements, superstitious taboos and to be given a new purpose, often a more philanthropic orientation. For example:

(i) The reason why a man who had just planted a vineyard or was newly married should be exempted from military service was originally a superstitious fear for the magic power of the spirit of vegetation and of fertility connected with the first crop of a new plantation and the first marriage act.<sup>5</sup> In Deuteronomy it is granted as a human

<sup>5</sup> The taboo on intercourse just before and during the Holy War, i.e., that "they should keep their vessels ritually clean," might come from a similar fear. It might also be in order to preserve all their energy (cf. 1 Sam. 21:6; 2 Sam. 11:11; also the sanctification before the theophany in Exod. 19:15). In the same way the exclusion from the assembly of a man with crushed testicles may be in view of the Holy War: every one should be in full possession of his energy (23:1).

concession to one who was to face a possible danger of death (20:6f.; 24:5).

(ii) Leaving the last sheaves, olives or grapes was at first a magic precaution to sustain the "spirit of fecundity" in fields, trees and vineyards. Now it is out of consideration for the poor, destitutes and marginal people (24:19-22).<sup>6</sup>

(iii) The command to bury the corpse of one who had been impaled, "hanged on a tree," before nightfall was originally given out of fear that the spirit of the dead man would wander around and harm the living as soon as darkness began to reign. The spirit was restless as long as the corpse was not buried. In 21:22f., the motivation is rather that the public exposure as a sign of divine curse should not be unduly protracted.

(iv) The forbidden combinations of 22:9-11 are simply listed without explanation. Originally they must have been considered as magic practices symbolizing unnatural cross-fertilization—or rather cross-sterilization since they go against the inviolable order of nature. The Code of Holiness (Lev. 19:19) stresses the attempt at cross-breeding, for example yoking a bull and a she-ass. The cloth of wool mixed with lines was a symbolic crossing of animal and vegetable fibres.<sup>7</sup>

(v) The tassels at the four corners of a shawl or night-covering symbolized magic horns to repel the evil spirits of the night. 22:12 does not give any reason for them but Num. 15:37f. of the P tradition reinterprets them as reminders of one's obligation to observe the Law.

However, there were some practices which could not be adapted at all. Whatever was clearly connected with the fertility cult of Baal or Mot was categorically ruled out (7:25 and 18:9-14) and such abominations deserved capital punishment (13:5 and 17:2-7). Neither the post of Asherah nor the pillar of Baal could be tolerated (16:21f.). Divination, soothsaying and the like (18:20f.) could have no place in Israel. If transvestite behaviour was considered as a serious cultic perversion, it is because it was probably connected with homosexual sacred prostitution (22:5). The "harlots" and the "dogs" of the fertility shrines are an abomination to YHWH (23:18f.).

It is probably in the context of religious polemics that the legislators of Shechem insisted on the central sanctuary, that is "the place which YHWH will choose to put his name there" (12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26). The sanctuaries of the dispossessed nations had to be des-

<sup>6</sup> The Priestly tradition, Lev. 25:5, retains a more ritualistic approach: the fields need a sabbath to restore their fertility. It is only what grows by itself during that year that goes to the poor. The "release" of the field was either unknown or in any case not observed by the Deuteronomists: ch. 15 does not mention it.

<sup>7</sup> The same word used by both documents, *sha'atnez*, a garment of cloth made of wool mixed with linen, which is of foreign origin.

troyed (7:5 and 12:2f.). In order to make this centralization more practicable several other regulations had to be adopted; for example one could eat "non-sacrificial" meat, that is meat of an animal which had not been slaughtered by a priest at the local sanctuary (12:15-25); in order to travel light to the distant holy place one could exchange the tithes of the harvest for currency and buy the equivalent after arrival (14:24-26); the Levites of the suppressed local shrines could minister at the central sanctuary and share in the remuneration of its clergy (18:6-8).

The exact location of the central place is not mentioned; it might be successively at the different places where the Ark was kept, Gilgal, Succoth, Shechem, Shiloh or—less probably—one city for each tribe.

Every seventh year, there was a renewal of the covenant. The ancient custom of leaving the land untilled is found in the Priestly tradition (Lev. 25:5): during that "sabbath" of the fields the Code of Holiness orders a return of all properties to the original owner (Lev. 25:10-17). The Deuteronomist does not mention these practices but decrees the "release" or lapse of all the outstanding debts among fellow-Israelites, both brothers and friends (15:1f.; the Hebrew word *shemittah* means "letting go"). The time between two years of "release" was subdivided into two and at the end of the third and sixth year the tithes were not taken to the central sanctuary, but apparently gathered and stored locally to be distributed in the seventh year to the Levites, the aliens, i.e., *gerim*, the widows and the orphans (14:28f.). 26:12-14 apparently wants to make sure that these stored supplies are not made to serve another purpose and renew the old abuses.

At the end of the seventh year, during the Feast of the Booths, the whole congregation of Israel came together for a renewal of their religious dedication. J. N. Wijngaards proposed a feast at Succoth on the east bank of the Jordan followed by a national pilgrimage to Shechem.<sup>8</sup> At Succoth, the whole salvation history would be dramatized and re-experienced by all (cf. 6:21-23). Thereafter a priest would exhort all to remain faithful to YHWH, more or less in the words recorded in 5:1-11:32. The whole Deuteronomistic Code would then be read publicly, together with some necessary explanations (31:10-13). Finally, the covenant was solemnly renewed (cf. "this day" in 26:16-19).

After the feast, the whole congregation along with the Ark would cross the Jordan (9:3) and proceed to Shechem where the covenant was to be further ratified with the proclamation of blessings and curses from the slopes of mounts Gerizim and Ebal (11:29 and 27:1-26).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. J. N. Wijngaards, *The Dramatisation of Salvific History in the Deuteronomistic School*, Leiden, 1969, pp. 1-31. The author bases himself mainly on the following texts: Josh. 3:14-17; 4:9; Hos. 6:7-10; Gen. 33:17-20; Exod. 13:18-20; Ps. 60:8-10.

The official "today" does refer to the celebration at Succoth, every seventh year, but individual Israelites did also renew their commitment by a profession of faith, when they brought their tithes after the harvest (26: 1-4).

The authors of the first Deuteronomy were spiritual leaders of Israel, probably Levites ministering at the sanctuary (17:9-12). They were conscious of carrying on the task of Moses and could therefore use the solemn "I" (*'ano'ki*) while addressing the people (15:11; 19:7; 24:18). Nevertheless they were also aware of their responsibility and proved to be true pastors of the people: their preaching is a typical mixture of persuasion, threats, promises, admonitions and instructions. They knew how to select and adapt local customs but also to reject what did not fit with their basic faith: they not only put age-old doctrine into newly adopted forms, but also assimilated new data of God's ongoing revelation.

Without attempting to summarize the Deuteronomistic concept of the "people of God," the following are certainly some of the salient aspects:

(i) YHWH is a unique, personal God: as redeemer He can ask trust and confidence (6:4f.) and as overlord of the Covenant He has the right to demand complete submission from his people (8:18-20).

(ii) He has chosen Israel as His special people among all the nations and this election sets them apart as "holy to YHWH" (7:6-8).

(iii) The experience of past generations is not to be forgotten but to be cherished as a pledge of God's benevolent care and this experience has to be "re-lived" as an incentive to further dedication (5:15). This remembrance will prevent Israel from turning away to other practices, from being unfaithful and thus forgetting the Lord (6:10-12).

(iv) One of the most striking aspects of the Deuteronomistic religion is its concern for others, especially for fellow-Israelites and "marginal" people:

(a) When a fugitive slave comes to you do not turn him over to his master, but give him refuge (23:19f.).

(b) If a fellow-Israelite borrows something from you, do not ask any interest from him (23:19f.).

(c) When a neighbour passes through your field, allow him to help himself there and then, but not to carry a load away (23:25f.).

(d) If you have to take a pledge from a poor person, do not confiscate his grinding stone, and if you take his night-covering, return it at sun-set (24:6 and 12f.).

(e) The one who deprives a person of his liberty and sells him as a slave shall himself be put to death (24:7).

(f) Daily wages must be paid before sun-set (24:14f.).

- (g) The "weaker section," that is the alien, widows and fatherless, shall not be exploited or deprived of justice. They have an implicit right to a small share of the harvest (24:17-22).
- (h) If torture is to be used at all, against a culprit, it shall never be excessive (25:1-3).
- (i) During the war, the land of your enemy can be devastated, but fruit trees must be spared because it would take too long to replace them (20:18f.).
- (j) A newly married man or one who has just built a house or planted a vineyard should not be called up for military service in a war (20:5ff.).
- (k) Women taken captive during the war should be allowed a certain time of mourning for their dead relatives and, even after this period, they must be treated with due respect (21:10f.).
- (l) If the animal of your enemy goes astray and you find him, return it to his master (22:1-4; Exod. 23:4f.).

Notwithstanding this very humane attitude towards one's fellow-Israelite and even towards the *ger* or alien who dwells within the gate, there is a certain clannish spirit, a restricted field of concern, a ghetto mentality:

- (a) They saw no harm in asking interest from non-Israelites; the debts of the latter did not lapse at the end of the year of "release" (15:3; 23:20), neither was a non-Hebrew slave set free on that occasion.
- (b) No Edomite or Egyptian could be admitted into the "assembly" until the third generation and the Amalekites and Moabites could not even be admitted after the tenth generation (23:3-8; 25:17-19).
- (c) No child born of a non-Jewish mother (*mamzer*) could enter the assembly of YHWH (23:2).<sup>9</sup>

This mentality can to a certain extent be explained by the sense of insecurity experienced at the initial stage of the conquest; both politically and religiously there was a danger from the other nations. It was however unduly prolonged!

### 3. The Community according to the later Deuteronomistic Historians

The Deuteronomistic traditions were kept alive throughout the monarchical period and even during the Exile. But their influence was felt much more when there was a movement of religious renewal

<sup>9</sup> This meaning of *mamzer* seems to be required in Zech. 9: 6, i.e., a child born of a non-Jewish mother. Others propose a child born from parents who are too closely related, within the forbidden degree of consanguinity.

as, for example, during the preaching of Elijah and Elisha, or under the zealous reformers Hezekiah and Josiah.

The redaction history of the whole Deuteronomistic work has not yet been satisfactorily completed and it is difficult to attribute certain passages to a definite period. Here we shall only try to point out a few characteristics of the final product and so gather the main ideas of the Deuteronomistic view on the community of Israel.

(i) *No prosperity without faithfulness to the covenant*

The theological prologue of the Book of Judges systematically outlines the whole process of salvation history (Judg. 2:6-36):

(a) Israel did what was evil in the eyes of YHWH (v. 11).

(b) God handed his people over into the hands of plunderers and enemies (v. 14).

(c) They were in sore straits and cried to the Lord (v. 15).<sup>10</sup>

(d) YHWH raised up a "judge" to deliver them (vv. 16-18).

(e) The enemies were defeated and the land was "at rest" for a conventional number of years, i.e., 20, 40 or 80 (Judg. 3:11, 30, etc.).

Most of these elements are clearly indicated in the case of several individual judges and the most classic application is the passage about Othniel.<sup>11</sup> But once the deliverer was dead the unfaithfulness started all over again!

The same alternation of falling away, YHWH's salvific intervention, repentance and conversion and further unfaithfulness recurs also in the major speeches that are placed like so many milestones at the important junctures of the Deuteronomistic history, usually towards the end of the life of a great personality:

(a) Moses, in the land of Moab beyond the Jordan (1:6-46)

(b) Joshua, before his death (Josh. 23:2-16)

(c) Samuel, when old and grey he spoke to "you and your king" (1 Sam. 12:1-25)

(d) Solomon, at the dedication of the temple and therefore just before his defection (1 Kings 8:13-52)

(e) the "historian's own reflection," as evaluation of Israel (2 Kings 17:7-23)

(ii) *The king shares the same obligation of faithfulness to YHWH*

The Books of Samuel and Kings give an interesting framework to the life of each individual king: the time he began to reign, his

<sup>10</sup> The formula "cried to the Lord"—*weyyiz'aq 'el YHWH*—is absent in the MT, but Kittel suggests that it should be restored.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Judg. 3:7-11 for Othniel; also Ehud (Judg. 3:12-15, 30); Deborah (Judg. 4:1-4; 5:31); Gideon (Judg. 6: 1-2; 8:28); Jephthah (Judg. 10:6, 10; 12:28).

age when he ascended the throne, how long he reigned, the name of his mother who must have been a very influential person in promoting the interests of her own son above those of the sons of rival queens. What is most significant for our purpose is the theological verdict passed on each monarch in terms of "walking in the footsteps of his father David" or not putting an end to the forbidden cult on the high place and under every green tree. Only two kings, the reformers Hezekiah and Josiah, are fully approved of, while six others are given only partial praise.<sup>12</sup>

The Deuteronomists apparently always had some reservation about a human king. Their ideal was a charismatic leader, chosen by YHWH, a *nagid*, while their only *melek* was God Himself. Even David was much more appreciated for his personal qualities: his dynasty, started at Zion, was first centred around his personal city-state which belonged to neither Judah nor Israel. It was only later that the ark was brought there.

17:14-20 reluctantly allows Israel to appoint a king and affixes some restrictions: he must be an Israelite, should not traffic with Egypt to increase his personal cavalry, must not make any alliance with other nations involving marriage with a foreign princess and importing the cult of foreign deities. In order to familiarize himself with YHWH's will and be guided by the Law, the king should have a personal copy of it, and read it regularly.

In his farewell speech, Samuel takes up the anti-monarchical tradition: they have stubbornly asked for a human king while YHWH alone is their "king" (1 Sam. 12:12). Samuel denies the king any special position or privilege: "If both you and your king . . . will follow the Lord your God, it will be well with you; if not, the hand of the Lord will be against you and your king . . . If you do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king" (vv. 14f., 25).

In the historians' final evaluation of the northern kingdom, the downfall was due to the people's walking in the customs of the nations, in spite of the prophets' warnings. But the main culprit was Jeroboam who made Israel commit a great sin (2 Kings 17:21). This "sin of Jeroboam" consisted in setting up two calves at Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:30; 14:9; 15:26, 30, 34; 16:19, 26). Ahab added to this sin by introducing the cult of Baal and Asherah (1 Kings 16:32f.) so that his successor, Ahaziah, is said to have committed both the "sin of his father and mother" and the "sin of Jeroboam" (1 Kings 22:52f.; compare this with 2 Kings 3:2f. where Jehoram is said to have committed only the "sin of Jeroboam").

H-J. Kraus has pointed out that all the kings who deserved the praise of the Deuteronomists have not only walked in the way of David, but also cleansed the land from all foreign cults.<sup>13</sup> King

<sup>12</sup> The six are: Asa (1 Kings 15:12f.), Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:43-45), Joash (2 Kings 11:18; 12:3-4), Amaziah (2 Kings 14:3), Azariah (2 Kings 15:3) and Jotham (2 Kings 15:34).

<sup>13</sup> H-J. Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1966, pp. 190-97.

Asa put away the Sodomites and removed the idols of his father (1 Kings 15:12) and the Chronicler, who knew this tradition, interpreted this reform as a prerequisite for the renewal of the covenant. The same connection between the purification of the cult and the renewal of the covenant is found in both 2 Kings 18:3f. and 2 Chron. 29:10f.<sup>14</sup>

Indicative of the subordinate role which the Deuteronomists attributed to the dynasty is the fact that they end their narrative saying that Jehoiachin was freed from prison and given an alimony. Not a word is said about the possible restoration of a son of David on the throne of Jerusalem! (2 Kings 25:29f.)

(iii) *The clergy are no more prominent than the prophets*

In his book, *Worship in Ancient Israel*, H. H. Rowley remarks, "Deuteronomy has little to say about the duties of the Levites whom it identifies with the priests. It is more concerned to define their dues (18:3f.) and it defines their functions as simply to minister before the Lord (18:5, 7)."<sup>15</sup> This is an indication that the influence of the Levites during the earlier period was rather considerable. Nevertheless it seems to have lessened as time went on. The Book of Judges already mentions that non-priests offered sacrifices (6:19 and 13:19f.). At Shiloh lay people sacrifice even when the priest Eli is at the shrine and therefore available (1 Sam. 2:13; 1:3f.). The main task of the Levites was "to guard the Ark" (2 Sam. 15:24). Although Zadok, who apparently did not belong to the tribe of Levi, was appointed priest in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 8:17), Jeroboam is said to go against the tradition when he puts non-Levites in charge of his places of worship (1 Kings 12:31). Apparently the Levitic origin was more stressed in the northern kingdom. In Judah, the "priests" advised the kings and could even play a decisive role in a time of crisis as for example, in removing the usurper Athaliah (2 Kings 11).

On the other hand, the growing influence of the prophets is a no less important factor. Even if some of them came from a priestly family (e.g. Jeremiah and Ezekiel), they definitely did not belong to the clerical structure and arose as charismatic leaders and free-lance reformers. Nathan might have been a "court-prophet" and as such it was he, and not a priest, who proclaimed YHWH's covenant with the Davidic dynasty. But Elijah never cowed down before kings and even Jeremiah did not mince his words against the social oppressor Jehoiakim (Jer. 22:13-19).

It is now widely accepted that Jeremiah was closely associated with Josiah's Deuteronomistic reform. His views can more or less reflect those of our historians. He often decries the aberrations of

<sup>14</sup> Some scholars, as e.g. H. H. Rowley, remark that Hezekiah's reform was mainly aimed at removing the *bamot* and Canaanite practices, but left the Assyrian cult more or less untouched.

<sup>15</sup> H. H. Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel*, S.P.C.K., London, 1967 p. 101.

false prophets and priests and speaks of them, as it were, in the same breath: "Both prophets and priests are ungodly!" (Jer. 23:11). They are working together hand in glove. "The prophets prophesy falsely and the priests rule (teach) at their direction" (Jer. 5:31). Theoretically, the priests were supposed to check on extravagant prophets (Jer. 29:26), but in the case at hand the priest Zephaniah did not arrest Jeremiah, instead he informed him about the letter of complaint he had received (v. 29).

It has been suggested that Yahwism had lost much of its influence in the countryside. With their emphasis on centralization of the cult, the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah would have brought about a certain secularization of daily life: as the sacred became connected with the temple far away, at home everything would become more profane.<sup>16</sup> One must always beware lest one projects one's modern concepts into the distant past, yet it is true, for example, that the three great pilgrimages which originated from the rhythm of agricultural life could have become more remote to the common farmer when the liturgists connected them to past historical acts of salvation: the Feast of Unleavened Bread with the Exodus (16:3), and the Feast of Booths with the wandering in the desert (P tradition in Lev. 23:42f.). Another remarkable observation is that the word *qahal*, assembly, often used in the Book of Deuteronomy, occurs only seven times in the Books of Samuel and Kings, of which five are found in the chapter on the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8)!<sup>17</sup> Later on,

<sup>16</sup> A. Causse has two articles in *Revue d' Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuse*, 1933: (i) "La transformation de la notion d'alliance et la rationalisation de l'ancienne coutume dans la réformation deutéronomique," pp. 1-29 and (ii) "L'idéal politique et social due deutéronome," pp. 289-323. Both are surprisingly modern in their analysis of society. He himself quotes the following interesting passage from Renan's *History of Israel*: "Charity and justice appear to us as belonging to two distinct fields . . . But the Deuteronomist fuses together the civil and political aspect with the moral, social and religious one. Love for the poor, for the marginal people, has never been so fervently advocated . . . The author of the Code did not know anything about true liberation. But in his mind the various members of society were all responsible for one another and stood guarantee for each other. His concept of living together as brothers is most inspiring . . . In his dream he contemplates rich peasants bringing their first-fruit to the temple and joining the Levites and the poor in singing the beautiful Psalm, 'How good and how pleasant it is when brothers live in unity!'" (Renan, *Histoire d'Israel*, pp. 227-29, my translation).

<sup>17</sup> The Book of Deuteronomy never uses the word *'edah* (which the LXX usually translates by *sunagoge* and which occurs about a 100 times in the Priestly tradition). It uses *qahal* (which LXX translates by *ekklesia*): according to some scholars it would denote an assembly in view of the Holy War, e.g., L. Rost and G. W. Anderson (cf. "Israel, Amphictyony—'am—Kahal," in the Festschrift for H. G. May, *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament*, ed. H. T. Frank and W. L. Reed, Abingdon Press, New York, 1970, pp. 135-51).

the sense of belonging to a sacred group connected with the central sanctuary is no longer so vividly felt.

Even if the movement was no longer universal, the inner circle and especially the Deuteronomistic historians still cherished the earlier traditions and relived the experience of God's special intervention. Whether an individual king was faithful or not did not affect the basic progress of God's plan: kings were not absolutely indispensable. The priests or Levites could fall short of their responsibility as guardians of the Ark and instructors of God's people. Some alleged prophets, who had not been sent by YHWH, might turn out to be but greedy impostors. In spite of this unfaithfulness and partial defection, God still found loyal prophets who reminded the people of His unique love and special care, who interpreted reversals as just punishments, as means of healing and as incentives for conversion. YHWH's word, spoken by these prophets, always came through,<sup>18</sup> for Israel's God is the Lord of History!

<sup>18</sup> G. von Rad has collected eleven clear prophecies with the corresponding passages in which it is stated that each has been fulfilled to the letter: cf. "The Deuteronomistic Theology of History" in *Studies in Deuteronomy*, S.C.M. Press, London, 1961, pp. 78-81.