

## GLIMPSES INTO THE FUTURE

### (Deuteronomy: Part 2)

Because entry into the land of Canaan as a permanent home would herald the beginning of a new era for the Israelites, a number of features in Moses' speeches in Deuteronomy address this future. Some concern institutions that would only arise later, such as, the monarchy and the building of a permanent temple to replace the movable tabernacle. Some involve current institutions that would develop further, such as, the role of prophets (though none would arise superior to Moses himself). In addition, Moses composed a "song" that envisioned a dark future of covenant failure. Alongside these glimpses into the future appear a wide variety of laws, some of them repetitions of laws already given in the earlier Torah scrolls as well as some new legislation that would affect the Israelites in their new home.

#### The Central Shrine

Of special importance in Deuteronomy is the call for a central place of worship after the land of Canaan had been conquered (12). Canaanite worship was performed at many different sites, shrines and high places, and Ba'al and Asherah, the Canaanite fertility deities, were believed to have many manifestations (12:1-3). The worship of Yahweh was to be different, however (12:4, 29-31). Even though the patriarchs had worshipped at multiple locations, once the Israelites were firmly in control of the land of Canaan, they were to establish a single place of worship (12:5, 11, 17-18, 26).

This instruction, of course, would become very important in the time of David and Solomon, when under their leadership the Israelites began constructing a central, permanent sanctuary on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. Until then, there had been a variety of sacred places used throughout the land of Canaan. However, once the new temple envisioned by David and constructed by Solomon had been built, these other sacred places were to be abandoned entirely.

Eventually, there would be a dispute about the site for this central shrine. Upon Solomon's death, the northern tribes would reject Mt. Zion outright (1 Kg. 12). After the exile, a group with roots in the northern kingdom of Israel would build an alternative sanctuary on Mt. Gerizim, and their version of Deuteronomy would specify that Mt. Gerizim was the specific site for the temple, implying, of course, that Mt. Zion in Jerusalem had been a colossal mistake.

#### The Coming Monarchy

Another future institution anticipated in Deuteronomy is the kingship. In God's covenant with Abraham, he promised that kings would come from his posterity (Ge.

#### THE SAMARITAN PENTATEUCH AND DEUTERONOMY

*Written in Samaritan script, the Samaritan Pentateuch is the sacred scripture of the Samaritans dating to before the time of Jesus. While there are minor differences in many places from the Masoretic Text, one of the most significant differences is in its version of Deuteronomy. Here, the listing of the 10 commandments includes a specific commandment to build an altar on Mt. Gerizim (rather than Mt. Ebal, as in the Masoretic Text), and this, in turn, becomes the precedent for the Samaritans building a temple on Mt. Gerizim, a belief that continued to separate Jews and Samaritans even up into the time of Jesus (Jn. 4:19).*

17:6, 16; 35:11). In the Balaam oracle, the same royal promise was reiterated (Num. 24:17). Here, God anticipated the day when the Israelites would adopt a monarchy as their form of government (17:14ff.). When they did so, the king they enthroned must be an Israelite chosen by God.

The rule for kingship included both restrictions and requirements. The king was forbidden to amass a huge herd of horses, he must not acquire a large harem, and he should refrain from building a large treasury of gold and silver (17:16-17). These restrictions were essentially aimed at the king not trusting in his own conventional resources for survival, but instead, putting his trust in Yahweh. Horses in the ancient Near East were used for military chariots, harems were usually acquired to establish political alliances, and a treasury was often little more than a war chest. The king of Israel, however, must not trust in any of these things; he must trust in Yahweh! Furthermore, he must keep a copy of the Torah with him at all times and read it regularly (17:18-20). Israel, of course, would eventually become a monarchy in the days of Samuel (1 Sa. 8-10). The first Israelite king to violate these restrictions extensively would be Solomon (1 Kg. 10:23-29; 11:1-8).

### The Law of the Prophet

The vocation of prophets in the ancient Near East was not confined to Israel. Archaeological texts as well as biblical ones indicate that other nations and other religions had prophets, Balaam being one the most notable. However, the law of the prophet for Israel was rigid. Since a prophet in Israel



*These two wood carvings of prophets by Gabriel Joly, ca. 1530, are housed in the Detroit Institute of Arts.*

claimed to speak for Yahweh, his predictions and imperatives must be absolutely accurate and faithful. Thus, the third commandment warns that the prophet must not use Yahweh's name in an empty way (5:11). If the prophet makes a prediction, it must come to pass, else he is liable for execution as a false voice (18:14-22). If a prophet urges the people to turn away from Yahweh to worship the Canaanite deities, even if he is able to perform miracles, he is still a false prophet and worthy of execution (13:1-5). Hence,

prophecy was not to be accepted uncritically, and in the years to come, there would be more false voices than true ones. In many cases, it would be prophet against prophet, and nowhere would this be more apparent than in the ministries of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Within the Deuteronomic law of the prophet there appears the prediction of a coming faithful prophet comparable to Moses himself (18:15, 18). At the end of the book, the appendix states that no prophet of this status had ever arisen by the time the book reached its final form (34:10-12).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There are different theories about when Deuteronomy reached its final form. Though much of the book is about Moses, there are some parts that seem to have been composed or edited later, suggested by anachronisms and/or events

## TORAH SURVEY

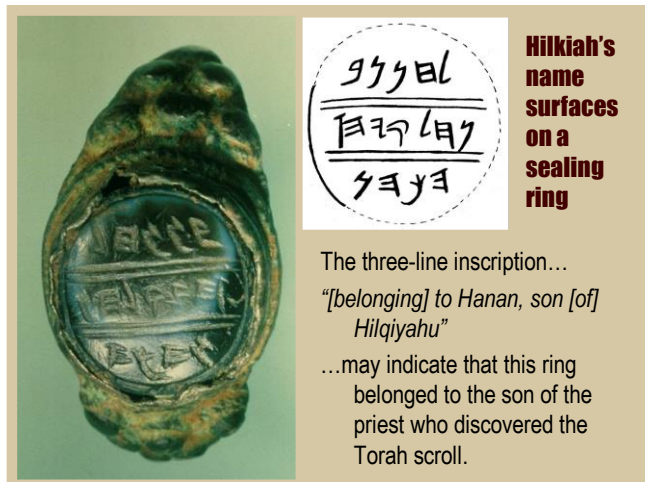
This prediction was never fulfilled in the Old Testament. It would await the coming of Jesus in the New Testament, who would be hailed as the “prophet like Moses” (cf. John 6:14; Ac. 3:21ff.).

### Josiah and the Book of Deuteronomy

Centuries after the time of Moses, near the end of the political life of Judah, King Josiah of Jerusalem inaugurated an extensive reform movement. He had ordered repairs to the temple (2 Kg. 22:3-7; cf. 2 Chr. 34:8ff.), and during these repairs, a momentous discovery fueled the fires of reform. It was a Torah scroll (lit., “a writing of the Torah”). Shaphan read it, reported the find to Josiah, and read it to him as well (2 Kg. 22:8-10). When the king had heard the reading, he was filled with consternation and immediately asked for a spiritual assessment of what he had heard. Apparently, the writing contained searing words of denunciation for covenant disobedience, and while no quotations are offered, the king’s reaction suggests that at least part of this scroll consisted of a curses section, such as is found in Deuteronomy 27-28 (2 Kg. 22:11-13). Josiah’s officials took the scroll to the prophetess Huldah, who may have been the senior prophetic voice in Jerusalem at the time (2 Kg. 22:14).<sup>2</sup>

Huldah’s interpretation of the Torah scroll was scorching! Disaster for covenant disobedience loomed as a real and imminent threat! The paganizing tendencies of the previous kings Manasseh and Amon and their predecessors had raised Yahweh’s ire, and his anger would not be quelled (2 Kg. 22:15-17). Josiah, however, would be given a reprieve. His reform efforts had not gone unnoticed by God, and while disaster would inevitably overtake Judah (cf. 2 Kg. 21:10-15), it would not come in his lifetime (2 Kg. 21:18-20).

What was this Torah scroll discovered in the temple? An incredible amount of ink and paper has been expended by scholars on this question. In the first place, one must remember that the so-



called “Books of Moses” were not preserved in a codex, such as would be the case later in the Christian era, but in individual scrolls. Hence, what was discovered was not the full Torah itself, but one of the five scrolls of the Torah. But which one? Scholars generally agree that the best candidate for the Torah scroll discovered by Hilkiah is the scroll of Deuteronomy. Josiah’s reforms emerged from the reading of this scroll (23:2), and since his reform consisted especially of

later than Moses (e.g., 3:11b; 29:27-28; 34:10-12). We assume, of course, that Moses did not record the narrative about his own death (34:1-8).

<sup>2</sup> The appeal to Huldah is striking for two reasons. First, she is the only prophetess directly mentioned in the kingdoms of either Judah or Israel other than the brief mention of Isaiah’s wife (cf. Is. 8:3). Earlier, Miriam, Moses’ sister, and Deborah, the Judge, are both given this title (Ex. 15:20; Jg. 4:4), but in a patriarchal culture, female spiritual leaders are the exception, not the norm. Second, it is entirely possible that the young Jeremiah was available, since the early years of his ministry began during Josiah’s 13<sup>th</sup> regnal year (cf. Je. 1:2), and possibly Zephaniah as well (cf. Zep. 1:1). This incident would have been five years later than the beginning of Jeremiah’s ministry. That the appeal was made to Huldah might suggest that she had “seniority” over the young Jeremiah and Zephaniah.

centralizing all worship in the Jerusalem temple, a theme found only in Deuteronomy, the conclusion seems solid.

### Miscellaneous Laws

Moses reviewed various others laws with the people in the Plains of Moab. Many of them were restatements or expansions of laws given earlier, such as, the requirements for **kosher food** (14:1-21; cf. Lv. 11), the practice of **tithing** (14:22-29; 26:1-15; cf. Nu. 18:21-32), the **sabbatical year** (15; Ex. 23:10-11; Lv. 25:1-8), the annual **pilgrim festivals** (16:1-17; cf. Ex. 34:22-23), the institution of **tribal judges and officers** (16:18-20; 17:8-13; 19:15-21; cf. Ex. 18:13-26), the **food for priests** from the sacrifices and offerings of the people (18:1-8; cf. Lv. 10:12-15), and the establishment of **asylum cities** for those accused of manslaughter (19:1-14; cf. Ex. 21:13; Nu. 35:6-28). Other laws, however, were here stated for the first time, and these included things like the procedure for **unsolved murder** (21:1-9), the **rights of female prisoners of war** (21:10-14), limiting the **exposure of an executed criminal** (21:22-23), the construction of **roof parapets** as a safety measure (22:8), and **grounds for divorce** (24:1-4). Several laws address sexuality in one way or another, such as, **adultery** (22:22-27), **rape** (22:28-29), **incest** (22:30), and **prostitution** (23:17-18). Some of these laws were practical, such as, **interest on loans** (23:19-20), **gleaning privileges** (23:24-25; 24:19-22), **military exemption** (24:5), **collateral on debt** (24:6, 10-13), **payment of wages** (24:14-15), **interfering in a fight** (25:11-12), and dishonesty in **weights and measures** (25:13-16).

### The Song and Blessing of Moses

Before he died, Moses composed a song for the Israelites that appears in the form of a covenant lawsuit. In a suzerainty lawsuit, the suzerain confronts his vassal for violating the covenant. He appeals to witnesses to substantiate his charge. Here, Moses confronted the Israelites with their past rebellions and the inevitability of their future covenantal failure (31:14-32:47). The language of the song is past tense, describing covenant failure as though it already had happened, but this tense merely emphasized the certainty of what Moses told them. The song was prophetic, and Israel was destined to be a prodigal son.

After blessing the tribes (33), Moses ascended Mt. Nebo and disappeared (34). From the top of the mountain, Moses could see the promised land, though he would not be able to enter it.



*Moses' view of the land of Canaan from the top of Mt. Nebo before it became the land of Israel.*