Lecture 8a: Deuteronomistic History - Introduction to the Historical Books

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Deuteronomistic History (DtrH)

- We discussed the Torah (five books of Moses) and now move on to the Neviim (Prophets).
  - Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings
  - Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah ("Major Prophets") and The Twelve ("Minor Prophets")
- The Former Prophets are called by modern biblical scholars "Deuteronomic History" or "Deuteronomistic History"
- Composition
  - During the Babylonian exile (586-538 BC), Jeremiah and Deuteronomy exercised a great influence on Hebrew Literature
  - Toward the end of the exile, some priests and scribes, inspired by Jeremiah and Deuteronomy, put together the "Deuteronomic History", covering a long period of time, from Moses (1250 BC) until the time of exile (ca. 550 BC)
  - Deuteronomic History is marked by the "theology" of Deuteronomy and the "prophetic spirit" of Jeremiah
    - Deuteronomy's Theology
      - Fidelity to the Law attracts God's blessing
      - "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob, to give them." (Deut. 30:15-20)
    - Jeremiah's Prophetic Spirit
        - God will destroy the Temple because people sinned against Him
        - God will bring the people into exile, so you should not seek other alliances (e.g. Egypt) against the Babylonians, because God already decided this punishment.
        - People should take it seriously, live in exile in Babylon and repent from their sins, that God may have mercy on them and return them to their homeland.
    - The main purpose of this history is to explain the exile, which was not meaningless: exile was God's punishment for people's neglect of the Law. Same explanation can be detected in Jeremiah and Deuteronomy, but the editors of DtrH applied this explanation to the entire history of Israel in the promised land.
- Structurally and Thematically, the Deuteronomistic History covers 5 periods/themes
    - Joshua: Conquest of land under Joshua; a time of obedience and blessing, God's power to defeat all of Israel's enemies
    - Judges: A troubled period of time with ups and downs (sin, punishment by foreign invasion, God raises a judge (i.e. military leader) to defend Israel). Samuel was the last judge and the first prophet.
    - King David: God's blessing of the land; high point of fidelity to the covenant, emphases placed on God protecting David (e.g. against Saul, against Absalom). Personal Covenant that Yahweh made with David's family to reign forever
        - Covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12 was a one-street covenant
        - Covenant with Israel in Exodus 19 was a two-street covenant (He blesses the people of Israel, they follow the commandments)
        - Covenant with David and his offspring in 2 Samuel 7 is a "personal" covenant - the Davidic Dynasty
            - The Northern Kingdom had at least ten separate Dynasties, but in the Southern Kingdom, only one - Dynasty of David. From the time of King David until the Babylonian Exile.
    - Period of Kings
        - Beginning with Solomon and continuing through the divided monarchy until the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC
        - The Southern Kingdom is meant to look better with 3 good kings (Asa, Hezekiah, Josiah) and Israel's kings all being evil
        - The emphasis falls on the prophets (especially Elijah) - to take the soft sound of stillness of the Lord and translate it to human language
    - The Fall of Judah/Jerusalem and the Exile
        - The exile was brought about on the people by themselves through their kings - kings are considered to be shepherds. Their responsibility is to tend their people like a shepherd tends his sheep. Instead, they accumulated property and power and neglected their responsibilities as caretakers of Israel.
        - The return of the people is conditioned on their repentance - God will help His people to embrace repentance (Deuteronomy 4:27-30, 30:1-10)
        - Jeremiah 31:31-34 - "new covenant" written by God in the hearts of His devotees. Theology of a "divine grace" foreshadows the Pauline theology emphasizing "grace"

- Final redaction of the Deuteronomistic History and editorial additions to the Book of Deuteronomy happened around 500 BC.
- The Deuteronomistic History is the history of the "victory of God's word" made known through prophets who delivered both warnings and promises
- They depict Israel at their best and worst moments of their history
- The "land" is a central theme throughout the Deuteronomistic History

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