

How We Got the Bible – part 2 The Deuteronomist

1. Now we approach the year 622 BC. Here is the situation: there are two sets of priests: the Aaronic and the Shilonite, both Levites. Power struggles developed in the priesthood early on and the divisions of the nation, the various captivities, and isolation made things worse. Each side keep writing, worshipping, and trying to keep the story of God alive.
2. One side worshipped in Shiloh as had David for much of his life and Samuel and the early priests and judges for all of theirs. The other side was in Judah, ruled by King Josiah. And it was there that a book was discovered, a book we think was Deuteronomy (most say we “know”).
3. The Deuteronomist didn’t write Deuteronomy but he edited it and used it as the beginning of a great history. From that beginning, he told the story of his people’s arrival in the land way back in the early years when the Exodus ended. That story included tales of the conquest and became what we know as the Book of Joshua.
4. He then told the story of the people of God in those early years in the land: Deborah, Gideon, Samson. That became the Book of Judges.
5. Next, he placed the stories of Samuel in Shiloh and, from there, traced the movement of Saul and David. Scroll length required he stop there and we call that First Samuel. He continued with the history of the Court of King David and we call that Second Samuel.
6. He took several of the texts we mentioned last week (and he named them as he did so) and wove together a history of the kings after David all the way down to King Josiah and that became First and Second Kings.
7. Using wording, grammar, syntax, theme and literary structure the work of the Deuteronomist can be traced as he weaves together all of the stories and materials available to him. We owe him a great deal. Through him, God was able to keep the story alive, gather it into one place (though others were still writing), so that it could be preserved for the chosen people of God – then and now.

8. Some have wondered why the Deuteronomist – or even those who gathered the Books of Moses – weren't troubled by the discrepancies and historical issues in the texts and doublets. The reason is simple, though extremely hard for us to understand: they weren't bothered by that; they were concerned with the arc of history, the theme of the story, the point of the movement of God in the story. That is why the Deuteronomist would include passages that indicated David's line would hold the throne forever even if they sinned (2 Samuel 7: 12-16) and also include passages that indicate that David's line only keeps the throne if they obey (1st Kings 8:25).
9. All of the conditional passages speak of the throne of Israel. All of the unconditional passages speak only of the throne. That seems small to us but it was huge to them: there would be a throne for David's line, but it might not be in Israel. Today, we know that we reign with Christ and our kingdom is not of this world. (Matthew 25:23)
10. A word about the word "forever." There is not a word in Hebrew or Aramaic that is equivalent to our word "forever." In Hebrew, it means "until the end" of whatever was being discussed. Their concept of time and totality was quite different from ours and that needs to be understood to avoid confusion when God speaks of land, throne covenants or even of destruction in hell. (see #12)
11. Another thing the Deuteronomist did which was extremely important: he centralized worship in Jerusalem. That would become critical for the arrival of Jesus in 625 years.
12. What the Deuteronomist did NOT know and could not anticipate was the death of Josiah from an Egyptian arrow. Now, the kingdom ruled by Josiah was taken away from the land. The eternal kingdom had ended. The place "where Yahweh causes His name to dwell" was burned down. The things the Deuteronomist says existed "unto this day" were gone. It would be as if a history of the USA were written from George Washington to JFK stating that the presidency of JFK would usher in a period of peace and stability for the ages...and then JFK was shot and killed.

13. Enter another editor/redactor. This one uses different terms and tenses...and he adds exceptions and consequences. He uses Manasseh, for example, as a reason why the people of God are in such terrible conditions and why God dropped the land and throne covenant (**2 Kings 21:8-15**). He recrafts the entire history to reflect the new reality. Who was this new redactor/editor? Two possibilities are floated: a school taught by the original editor or the original editor himself.
14. Who was he? There is no question that Ezra had a LOT to do with the Hebrew scriptures we have today. He indicates that in his writing – but he comes later. It is more likely that the one who did this final version of Israel's history was a prophet working at the time of the fall of Israel and that would make it Jeremiah or his secretary, Baruch. I lean toward Baruch because of a 1980 archaeological discovery – a scroll of a seal impression that once sealed a scroll tied with string. It says “belonging to Baruch son of Neriyah the scribe.” It is the first archaeological discovery of an object that belonged to a person mentioned in the Bible. Where it was found is also important: a place where scribal materials were gathered and edited. The final writer of our first eight books was most likely Baruch.
15. This is important for several reasons but one main one for us: both Jeremiah and Baruch took scripture very, very seriously and would not have added or changed it in any way (re the order of Jeremiah).
16. Now we have the first eight books...but what happened after that? Exile. **Psalm 137**. For the Jews who fled Judah and went to Egypt, they did not fare well, either. Nineteen years after Judah was taken into captivity, Babylon invaded Egypt. We know that a colony of Jew (mainly mercenaries?) lived in a community on Elephantine, a peninsula/island in the Nile. Jeremiah told us that the Judean army took them to Egypt so this fits with history and scripture.
17. Here is where the Jews wrestled with a big question: is Yahweh a national God, therefore left behind in Judah, or is He a transcendent God? Now that the temple is destroyed, how are we to worship Him? The Jews on Elephantine built a temple there but their worship was corrupt (they worshiped Yahweh and two other gods,

one male, one female). That temple lasted until the fifth century when it was destroyed and Jews refused to rebuild it.

18. Prophets worked both in Egypt and in Babylon. Ezekiel envisioned a new temple to be built in Jerusalem but perhaps it was a symbolic one because the one he envisioned was never built. The people of God needed to learn how to worship God without a temple and without priests and sacrifices.
19. When Cyrus conquered Babylon in 538 BC, he issued a decree saying the Jews could go home. They took with them the furniture of the temple with one exception: the Ark of the Covenant and all its contents disappeared and have never been found. When they rebuilt the temple, the Holy of Holies was an empty room.
20. Another thing that disappeared is David's royal line. At first, they show up in the persons of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel, both royals related to David. But after the 5th chapter of Ezra they disappear and there is no mention anywhere of what happened to David's royal line. Also disappearing...the prophets. Haggai and Zechariah prophesied around the time of Ezra and Zerubbabel but then they and their kind fade away.
21. What we don't know and what disappears is rather extensive. Let's review:
 - a. The 50+ years of exile in Babylon are not described.
 - b. The nation's most precious object and its royal line disappear.
 - c. Prophecy fades out and disappears.
 - d. How many people in Babylonian captivity took advantage of the right of return? Did the majority stay or leave? (Arabic use of this mystery and of the Egyptian Jews)
 - e. We aren't sure of the movement of God's people during this time. Jeremiah says 4,600 were deported to Babylonia in 587. 2nd Kings says it was 11,600. Ezra says that when the time of return came, 42,360 returned. He might be counting those from the northern tribes who survived along with some from Egypt. We just don't know.

22. And here we run into a major point that we need to focus on: the Bible wasn't written as a history book to answer our questions about history. It was written to bring us to Jesus. (Gal. 3:23-29 and the Transfiguration)
23. When the temple was completed in 516 BC, the Aaronid priests were in charge. In fact, the Mushite priests of the north and of the line of Moses were gone, never mentioned again. Who IS mentioned is the second lawgiver. The first was Moses. The second was Ezra. He brought with him into Jerusalem the entire first five books of the Bible, the torah, the Books of Moses. He and Nehemiah restored the worship of God in Jerusalem, the Sabbath, and the laws concerning marriage within the faith and bloodline.
24. It was at this time that the people of God became, truly, people of the Book (as they are known to themselves and to Arabs). The Book centralized them, coalesced their story, and gave them meaning and hope.