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Standing on the Brink of the Jordan: Eschatological Intention in Deuteronomy

Geoffrey R. Boyle

When theologians speak of eschatology, they often have different things in mind than simply “last things.” Furthermore, when exegetes speak of eschatology, the discussion generally centers on the New Testament, focusing more upon the “apocalyptic” elements within it (i.e., Matthew 24–25; Mark 13; and book of Revelation). Rarely does the Old Testament enter the conversation, except perhaps in discussion of Daniel 7–12 and the prophetic *בְּיָמֵי-הַהוֹיָא* (“that day”).¹ Nevertheless, this study will examine the eschatological thrust of Deuteronomy, specifically that which pertains to the *telos* of God’s direction and purpose of human history.² An “already/not yet” eschatology is evident both within the structure of Deuteronomy, as well as in its content.

The canonical placement of Deuteronomy presents both an eschatological conclusion to the Mosaic *Torah* as well as an eschatological impetus for all that follows—namely, the prophets.³ Deuteronomy functions a bit like a hinge, both concluding and beginning—hence the numerous theories of both a Pentateuch/Hexateuch on the one hand, or a Tetrateuch and Deuteronomistic history on the other.⁴ Yet aside from canonical ordering on the grand scale, within the book itself there is a clear eschatological tension, both in geographical imagery—“beyond the Jordan,” anticipating the Promised Land—as well as homiletically, by means of eschatological

¹ Cf. Isa 2:11; Jer 30:8; Hos 2:16; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:11; Zech 3:10. Though not comprehensive, these citations demonstrate the multiplicity of witnesses to this eschatological day. Of the 63 OT references, all fall within the latter prophets save three: Deut 31:17–18 (it occurs twice) and 1 Sam 8:18.

² See K.E. Brower, “Eschatology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T.D. Alexander and B.S. Rosner (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000): 459–464.

³ We are unaccustomed to think of what follows Deuteronomy as the “prophets,” though that is the traditional designation of the books of Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings.

⁴ Even conservative scholars will not deny the Book of Deuteronomy a lively literary history with later shaping and editing. See Horace Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh: An Introduction to the Origin, Purpose, and Meaning of the Old Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979), 91.

rhetoric. Moses' preaching turns on the temporal axis of past, present, and future. This combination of both realized and inaugurated eschatology provides the key to unlocking the purpose of the book: to gather all Israel today (Ps 95:7) before the Lord as at Horeb in order to receive the promise, as if access to Sinai has not and will never end.⁵

Moses' rhetoric of past, present, and future governs a uniquely eschatological impulse within the book, permitting "Israel" of any and all generations to hear the sermon as if "God made the covenant with *us* . . . who are all of us here alive today" (Deut 5:2-3). The "eschatology that is in process of realization"⁶ draws each hearer into the "now" of receiving and requires each to *remember, hear, keep*, and consequently, to *enter and possess* what will be theirs in the "not yet." Brevard Childs notes the historical and theological problem well: "There is only one covenant and one law, but there are different generations, facing new challenges. How does the old relate to the new?"⁷ This is precisely what Deuteronomy intends to answer, and in the process invites its hearers, even those today, to find themselves standing before the Lord's promise—both already given and yet more still to come!

I. Structural Eschatology

The shape of Deuteronomy reveals an eschatological motivation and demonstrates a unity of form and content that is neither arbitrary nor accidental. Before examining Deuteronomy on its own, however, it is important to understand how the work functions within the canonical corpus as a whole. Notable here is Martin Noth's thesis of the Deuteronomistic history.⁸ This "history" begins with an introduction to the whole work (Deuteronomy 1-3), continues with an introduction to the law (Deuteronomy 5-11), and then the law itself (Deuteronomy 12-26). The history then, according to Noth's thesis, forms one composite work, which carries on with Joshua and continues through 2 Kings. There are ever-growing challenges to this thesis. What Noth's theory assumes is a Biblical genre termed "history."⁹ "History," however, does not appear to function

⁵ See Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 224.

⁶ Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S.H. Hooke (London: SCM Press, 1963), 230.

⁷ Childs, *Introduction*, 215.

⁸ Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 15 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981).

⁹ History is central to the thesis of John Van Seters as well, who, dealing with the classical categories of JEDP, purports "J" (the Yahwist) to be the first *historian* (cf. J. Van

categorically within the Old Testament canon.¹⁰ What we have in terms of canonical formation and achievement is what would commonly be known as “the law and the prophets.”¹¹ While history certainly helped to convey the prophetic storyline, it was not *history qua history* that was being written. Deuteronomy, then, functions as the eschatological pivot that connects the Law and the Prophets.

It should also not be forgotten that we are dealing with a narrative.¹² The story begun in Genesis and carried through Deuteronomy is largely coherent: from primeval history (Genesis 1-11) and patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12-50) in Genesis, to the story of Moses and wandering Israel under the Lord’s providential care in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. This story continues seamlessly into Joshua (thanks to Deuteronomy 31-34) and throughout the “former prophets.”¹³ It is not difficult to see how Noth construed his category of “history.”¹⁴ But the question at hand is how? How does one go from Law to Prophet, Moses to Joshua, wilderness to Promised Land? Deuteronomy offers itself as a solution. The book ties the *grammar* together, including even the latter prophets, most notably Jeremiah. Clements affirms, “In a striking way, therefore, Deuteronomy manages to serve as a link between ‘The Law and

Seters, *Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis* [Louisville: WJK, 1992]).

¹⁰ See E.A. Kauf, “From History to Interpretation,” in *The Fabric of History: Text, Artifact, and Israel’s Past*, ed. D. Edelman, JSOTSS 127 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991): 26-64, where he argues that the genre of “history” is anachronistic.

¹¹ See Christopher R. Seitz, *The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets: The Achievement of Association in Canon Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), who argues that this literary conjunction is a grammar, “by which the language of Israel’s scriptures makes its voice most fundamentally heard, and hearing that rightly is unaffected by the existence of additional writings” (33). Cf. Stephen Chapman, *The Law and the Prophets: A Study in Old Testament Canon Formation*, Forschungen zur Altes Testament 27 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

¹² For a helpful narrative-critical approach, cf. R. Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History, Part One-Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980).

¹³ Chapman argues, “Rather than driving a wedge between Law and Prophets, Deut 34:10-12 construes the significance of Moses in such a way as to connect his work theologically with the work of the prophets who follow him. . . . The work of the prophets stands behind the image of Moses in the Torah itself and the traditions in the prophetic corpus have been shaped along the lines of the mosaic portrait,” *The Law and the Prophets*, 127-128.

¹⁴ See Ronald E. Clements, *Deuteronomy*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 96: “From the point of view of the Old Testament story there is no major break between the ending of the era of Moses, with which the Pentateuch comes to a close, and the beginning of the era of the ‘Former Prophets’, which commences with the book of Joshua.”

the Prophets' as well as between the exodus and the settlement in the land."¹⁵ This connection is canonically intended based on the prophetic character of this book.

Central to this connective work of Deuteronomy is the prophetic witness of the Joshua-Kings complex. More than mere history, it relates in a proto-typical way the "prophet like [Moses]" (Deut 18.15), whom the Lord raised up from among the people: beginning with Joshua himself, and including Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha. Moses anticipates each of these prophets and each follows his lead by drawing his generation back to Sinai's God.¹⁶ Indeed, the function of any prophet is to speak forth the Lord's Sinai word under a new context. Prophets interpret Torah as the mouthpiece of the Lord—they simply speak forth what the Lord shows them in the divine council.¹⁷ Such prophetic interpretation of Torah is explicit in Deuteronomy: "Beyond the Jordan, in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to *explain* [בְּאֵר] *this law* [אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה תְּהַזָּא], *saying* . . ." (Deut 1:5). But this is all to be expected. One cannot have Torah without the Prophets—the two come together to deliver a lively encounter between the Lord and his people.¹⁸ This encounter places the law and the gracious work of God in recent history on one side, and the promise of (near) future inheritance and blessing on the other. It then preaches to those of each generation, seeking the faith necessary for entrance into the land. Deuteronomy then bridges this past and future gap with a word for those gathered today.¹⁹ The prophetic task in Deuteronomy is to elicit a con-

¹⁵ Clements, *Deuteronomy*, 97.

¹⁶ See Seitz, *The Goodly Fellowship*, 71: "The book of Deuteronomy—by intimating an order of prophets to follow and insisting that future generations under that new order find themselves always with the fathers at Sinai—created a radical closing of one canonical section and a maximal relating of two evolving canonical sections."

¹⁷ Pertaining to this council, see Amos 3:7. "God speaks to his divine court, from which various voices respond, in a manner similar to what is depicted in 1 Kings 22 ('and one said one thing, and another said another');" (Christopher R. Seitz, "The Divine Council: Temporal Transition and New Prophecy in the Book of Isaiah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109:2 (1990): 229–47, 235.

¹⁸ Seitz (*The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets*, 26 n.15) refers here to an unpublished Society of Biblical Literature paper read at the 2007 international meeting in Vienna by Georg Steins, who contends: "There is no canonized Torah without Prophets, for a Torah without interpretation is inconceivable [*da eine 'Tora' ohne Auslegung nicht vorstellbar ist!*]" (13).

¹⁹ Patrick Miller, states: "Thus the Book of Deuteronomy is to be understood backwards; its significance is its summarizing and closing of the foundational period. Deuteronomy signals that the period is over. That very fact, however, means that the book is also to be understood from the future. Its impact is not fully comprehended apart from reading the books that follow and sensing sharply that the word of the Lord in Deuteronomy is

fession from the people, one that professes who they are now on the basis of what happened in the past, as well as who they will be on account of the promises of God.

But, so as not to lose sight of the details in an overarching literary achievement, we now take a closer reading. How Deuteronomy is structured internally helps to focus the eschatological pulse of the text.²⁰ Dennis McCarthy and Meredith Kline, among others, have argued quite convincingly that Deuteronomy is, in some manner, structured after the ancient suzerain-vassal treaties of the Near East.²¹ But why would the author employ this treaty form? This structure enacts an agreement between Yahweh and his people. If they hear and keep the whole law (*Torah*) then they will have life. The treaty format provides the direction for the translation of the people from where they are now to what they will be. If they keep to the treaty, they will receive the *telos*, which the Lord has set for them (the land). If not, then curses abound (Deut 27:9–26; 28:15–68)! According to this structural model, the book functions as a plea for faithfulness to Yahweh, the one God of Israel (Deut 6:4–5).

The superscriptions throughout the book, along with Deuteronomy 5, demonstrate the progression from past to present and into the future.²²

always set for future generations. The intentionality of the book prohibits its ever being viewed as over and done, an enterprise belonging only to the past. No other book of the Old Testament is so straightforward and self-conscious about its character as a guide for the future." *Deuteronomy: Interpretation* (Louisville: WJK Press, 1990), 10.

²⁰ There are three dominant theories behind the structuring of Deuteronomy. The first relies upon the Ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties—either Hittite, Assyrian, a combination of both, or "Egyptian see Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1991); Gordon J. Wenham, *The Structure and Date of Deuteronomy: A Consideration of Aspects of the History of Deuteronomy Criticism and a Re-Examination of the Question of Structure and Date in Light of that History and the Near Eastern Treaties*, Ph.D. diss. (University of London, 1970); Peter Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976). The second examines the "superscriptions"; see Dennis T. Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses: A Theological Reading*, *Overtures to Biblical Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994]. The third suggests a concentric literary model (See Duane Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, 2nd ed., World Bible Commentary [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001], lviii).

²¹ Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, *Analecta Biblica* 21 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1994); Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1989).

²² See Deut 1:1; 4:44; 6:1; 29:1; 33:1. Olson suggests, "Chapter 5 is the *torah* of Deuteronomy *en nuce*," *Deuteronomy*, 15. For his catechetical theory for the book, chapter 5 is crucial because there the Ten Commandments are actually given.

Israel's past story (Deuteronomy 1-4) leads to a confession of the Torah in a nutshell (Deuteronomy 5). This gives way to laws for the present (Deuteronomy 6-28) and a new covenant for the future (Deuteronomy 29-32). Finally blessings for future generations abound, from death to life (Deuteronomy 33-34).²³ Olson rightly concludes,

In both form and structure, the book of Deuteronomy intends to bring readers of every age to claim its *torah* as their own. Moses' words to the ancient Israelites beckon each new generation. . . . The contemporary reader is invited to join Deuteronomy in a transformative journey that leads from past to present and on to a future yet to be revealed.²⁴

The third structural hypothesis to merit attention is based on literary concentricity.²⁵ This structure adheres closely to an eschatological purpose: the *Torah* is central to Israel's past as well as her future, while the outer frames interact with the central core in an explicitly eschatological manner. However, whether such a broad parallelism is inherent in the text, or forced from without, is another question.

What these structural models suggest is that no matter how one approaches the text, the theological intention is clear: all of time (past, present, and future) is brought into a dialogue between God and man through the prophet Moses. Deuteronomy, however, does not provide how the dialogue concludes, hence a not yet fully realized eschatology.

So, does the actual content of Deuteronomy match all that has been gleaned from its form (*lex orandi; lex credendi*)?²⁶ The answer is a resounding "Yes!" A helpful case study is chapter 8.²⁷ Here, again, we are

²³ Olson, *Deuteronomy*, 16.

²⁴ Olson, *Deuteronomy*, 17.

²⁵ Christensen's model is as follows:

- A The Outer Frame: A Look Backward (Deut 1-3)
- B The Inner Frame: The Great Peroration (Deut 4-11)
- C The Central Core: Covenant Stipulations (Deut 12-26)
- B' The Inner Frame: The Covenant Ceremony (Deut 27-30)
- A' The Outer Frame: A Look Forward (Deut 31-34)

²⁶ See Peter Vogt, *Deuteronomical Theology and the Significance of Torah: A Reappraisal* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 22. "Structure should be identified on the basis of form *and* content, not simply in terms of one or the other."

²⁷ Perhaps even more apparent is the role of Moses. See Olson's *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses*, where his thesis of a catechetical purpose is rooted in the recurring theme of Moses' death. Indeed, the author presents Moses as the embodiment of the book's eschatology: "For you shall see the land before you, but you shall not go there, into the land that I am giving to the people of Israel" (Deut 32:52). In addition, it is Joshua, Moses' successor, who ushers the people into the land. Joshua stands as the type

dealing with a concentric model, two variations on the theme follow:

1. Lohfink/Weinfeld²⁸
 - A. 8.1: Paraenetic Frame/Exhortation
 - B. 8.2–6: Wandering in the Desert
 - C. 8.7–10: The Richness of the Land
 - D. 8.11: Do not Forget YHWH/Exhortation (central idea)
 - C¹. 8.12–13: The Richness of the Land
 - B¹. 8.14b–16: Wandering in the Desert
 - A¹. 8.19–20: Paraenetic Frame

2. Van Leeuwen/Olson²⁹

8.1: Introductory Frame—Observe the Commandment that You May Live

8.2–17: Remember/Do not forget

 - I. 8.2–10: Remember (רָזַח)
 - A. 8.2–5: *Wilderness journey in past*
(Result of remembering: obedience to God – 8.6)
 - B. 8.7–9: The *promised land* in the *future*—echoes of the Garden of Eden
(Result of remembering: praise of God – 8.10)
 - II. 8.11–17: Do not Forget (שָׁכַח)
 - B¹. 8.11–13: The *promised land* in the *future*
(Result of forgetting: exalt yourself – 8.14)
 - A¹. 8.15–16: The *wilderness journey in the past*
(Result of forgetting: claim self-sufficiency – 8.17)

8.18–20: Closing Frame—Remember and Live; Forget and Perish

Olson's model makes the best sense of the chapter's content. The two-tiered pattern with a balanced chiasm allows for both hymns to fit into the structure and emphasizes the tension of faithfulness and disobedience, remembering and forgetting.³⁰ Notice also the balance of time and place: wilderness/past and promised land/future. The central thought is bi-focal: remember and do not forget. Remember the Lord's graciousness—both His

of eschatological realization, whereas Moses functions as the icon of future hope—for there will be a "prophet like Moses" (18:15).

²⁸ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 397; cf. N. Lohfink, *Das Hauptgebot: Eine Untersuchung literarischer Einleitungsfragen zu Dtn 5–11* (Rome: Pontifical Bibl. Inst., 1963): 189–199.

²⁹ Olson, *Deuteronomy*, 55. See Van Leeuwen, "What Comes Out of God's Mouth?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985): 55–57.

³⁰ Hymn to the Land (8:7–10) and Hymn to YHWH (8:14b–16). See Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 72.

guidance in the past (wilderness) and his promise for the future (land)—so that you do not forget in the future; and thus fall away from Yahweh, utterly perishing.³¹ This theme is enhanced by the eschatological vocabulary of past, present, and future: “these forty years” (8:2, 4), “today” (8:1, 11, 18, 19), and the future, “when you have eaten” (8:12). Consequently, the temporal aspect of Deuteronomy 8 roots the future life of Israel in her confession of Yahweh’s work in the past. The decisive acts of the present are the eschatological now and not yet that every generation must face.³²

II. Geographical Eschatology

The Jordan: Landmark, Theological Metaphor, or Covenant?

The Jordan River stands as the physical boundary between the Law and Prophets. Yahweh commanded Moses, “You shall not go over this Jordan” (Deut 31:2). But to Joshua He promised, “Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the people of Israel into the land that I swore to give them. I will be with you” (31:23). As the book of Joshua narrates the crossing, realizing this promise (at least in part), Deuteronomy can only anticipate the crossing.³³ For Moses and those gathered around his preaching, the Jordan stands as a “metaphysical reality”—the judgment of sin—while the land reveals the blessing of life with Yahweh.³⁴ Both “land” and “Jordan” might be best understood as eschatological characters within the narrative of Israel’s journey.

The Jordan appears by name twenty-six times in Deuteronomy. Only once does it appear within the “laws” (Deut 12:10); the rest occur within the sermons at the beginning and end. The author uses the Jordan River in two ways: first, as a simple geographical reference point (Deut 1:1, 5; 3:8, 17). Second, it serves as the (theological?) boundary to the land (2:29; 3:20, 25, 27). The two are not mutually exclusive. The precise locatedness with

³¹ See Dean Wenhe, “Redeeming Time—Deuteronomy 8:11–18: Dedication of Crucifixes,” *CTQ* 65 (2001): 157–159, “[Deut 7:6b–8] is what Israel was called to remember: the gracious character of their God” (158).

³² See Telford Work, *Deuteronomy*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), who states: “Remembering all of Israel’s past is essential . . . lest God’s forgetful people lapse into either despair or complacency. We always recall that ‘he suffered, died, and was buried’ and that ‘on the third day he rose from the dead’” (111).

³³ The exegesis of Psalm 95 in the Epistle to the Hebrews suggests that Joshua did not fully realize what was promised, thus confirming an inaugurated eschatology for both Deuteronomy and Joshua (Heb 4:8–11).

³⁴ Henry O. Thompson, “Jordan River,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary: Volume 3, H–J*, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992): 953–958.

which Deuteronomy opens suggests there is more to the locative aspect than merely a historical/geographical account. Thus Deuteronomy intentionally begins geographically:

These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab. It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea. In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the LORD had given him in commandment to them (Deut 1:1-3).

Within these three verses a specific time, place, and event are presented, one that the narrative will unfurl as the journey proceeds. Now, whenever the Jordan is referred to in connection with the entrance into the land, similar vocabulary ensues: "land," "possess," "cross over," and "today." There are approximately twelve additional implied references, where the text speaks of crossing over into the land, yet omits "the Jordan."³⁵ There is one more possible reference that is quite striking: "You are standing today all of you before Yahweh your God...that you may cross over/into the covenant of Yahweh your God, and over/into His oath which Yahweh your God is making with you today" (Deut 29:9-11 ESV: 29:10-12). We see the expected vocabulary, but, "today" and "crossover"—yet no explicit mention of the Jordan; neither is mention made of the land. This suggests that the crossing of the Jordan into the land connotes the establishing of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. Rather than crossing over the "Jordan," the people are to cross over the "covenant." Instead of entering into the "land," they are to enter into Yahweh. The rhetoric intends the confusion of subjects, perhaps in order to reveal the theological import of the geographical imagery. Thus, the Jordan is the theological boundary separating Moses and his generation from entering the covenant of the land, it stands between Law and Prophets.

The Land: Eden, Post-Exilic Jerusalem, the Church, or Heaven?

With all this in mind, the greatest sin warned against in Deuteronomy is to have the land without Yahweh—a first commandment issue. Yahweh identifies himself with the land "beyond the Jordan." That is where his promise lies; that is where the past has been working its way forward until the present, and where this present gathering will "today cross over the Jordan" (9:1). Deuteronomy 8 again helpfully distills this theological move of identifying Yahweh with the land. Within a carefully structured chapter

³⁵ Deut 3:18, 21, 25, 28; 4:14; 6:1; 9:3; 11:8, 11; 27:3; 31:3; 34:4.

there appear two hymns—one, to the land, the other to Yahweh.

To the Land (8:7-10)

Yahweh your God is bringing you into a good land
 . . . of brooks of water, of fountains and springs
 . . . of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates
 . . . of olive trees and honey
 . . . in which you will eat bread without scarcity, lack nothing
 . . . whose stones are iron and from whose hills you can dig copper
 You shall eat and be full, and bless Yahweh for the good land he
 has given you.³⁶

To Yahweh (8:14b-16, 18a)

Then your heart be lifted up, and you forget Yahweh your God,
 who
 . . . brought you out of the land of Egypt
 . . . led you through the wilderness
 . . . brought you water out of the flinty rock
 . . . fed you in the wilderness with manna
 You shall remember Yahweh your God.

Concerning the land, von Rad notes the tenor of praise throughout: "Everything is described here by asserting sheer perfection, almost as though it were describing a paradise."³⁷ Telford Work notices the eschatological nature of its description:

Yet the rain, grain, new wine, oil, grass, and being full in this passage do carry eschatological significance. Ordinary blessings of Israel in the land become stock images of extraordinary restoration in the fullness of time, and the absence of the former drives sufferers to hope in the latter. Every day, every week, every season, and every annual cycle foreshadow the age to come, not just before the first advent but also now as we prepare for the last.³⁸

The juxtaposition of land and Yahweh encourages eschatological imagery. Notions of "paradise" are striking. This land of the (near) future for Israel resembles the description of Eden, or paradise—the land in which Yahweh walked (Gen 3:8).³⁹

³⁶ See Deut 11:10-12.

³⁷ Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, 72.

³⁸ Work, *Deuteronomy*, 133.

³⁹ Another angle to approach this identification of Yahweh with the land is by way of the discussion of the Levites: "Therefore Levi has no portion or inheritance with his brothers. The LORD is his inheritance" (Deut 10:9). The Levites, in some manner, *realize*

The relation of Moses to the land is also unique. Certainly the main actor in the narrative, Moses is not permitted entrance. Moses embodies the perspective of Deuteronomy by his clear anticipation of the land, but prohibition to enter. Moses is even given to *see* the land, the promise, the fulfillment—but not to cross over and into it; he is himself a now and not yet figure.

Like Moses, Deuteronomy's narrative audience—the people of Israel gathered at the foot of the Jordan—stands in the same eschatological position as anyone under the promise, but not yet within its fulfillment. Here, the church stands, too. For there is a promised land—"that Yahweh swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give to them and to their offspring after them" (Deut 1:8)—and though we catch glimpses of it here and there, there is a fullness yet to come. Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and Absolution present participation (*koinonia*) in the not-yet.

The Place [מקום]—Shechem? Shiloh? Jerusalem? Rome? St. Louis? Heaven?

What is to happen once Israel crosses over the Jordan/Covenant and into the land/Yahweh? Well, the event pertains to the place, "the place that Yahweh your God will choose to cause His name to dwell" (Deut 14:23). This place, appearing fifteen times within the text, is found predominately within the legal chapters of Deuteronomy 12–26. Each instance of the place discusses the sacrificial acts pertaining to this precise location (cf. Deut 12:6). It is also a place of "rejoicing" (12:18; 16:11, 15) and judging of hard cases (17:8–11). But Deut 31:11 is unique in that "the place" becomes also the place of hearing the law. This "place" serves as the third geographical character within Deuteronomy that elicits an eschatological awareness.

This "place," no doubt to the implied author, is a future reality. It exists only if the Jordan is crossed and the land is entered. It stands in antithesis to the many places of the Canaanites. The singular location affirms the First Commandment, both in the way of the Law and the Gospel: here, not there, boundary and freedom (thus, sacrifice and rejoicing, together). However, the where of this decisive location is another question, depending on where the audience is situated. The obvious retrospective choice is Jerusalem: Yahweh spoke of Solomon's temple, "My Name shall be there" (1 Ki 8:29). For Christendom it is the Church—the gathering of those baptized into the name around his word of Gospel

the eschatological direction of the land. They inhabit the land, but are given no definite borders within, in order to anticipate the final dwelling of Israel within Yahweh—no borders, no special allotments, just the Lord as inheritance.

proclaimed and his sacraments rightly administered (AC VII). For Israel who crossed with Joshua, perhaps the place was Shechem (Joshua 24) or Shiloh (Judg 21:19)? Or are we even asking the right question? McConville suggests otherwise:

Deuteronomy's decision to refrain from naming a place is in keeping with its fundamental understanding of divine presence, which it consistently advocates. In that understanding lays a paradox. Yahweh really makes himself present among his people on earth, in the context of a relationship which he enters with them at a time and in a place.⁴⁰

Therefore, the historical ambiguity is intentional; it invites readers or hearers of all times and all places to participate in the place.

What is necessary is that the place originates by Yahweh's choosing and that it is one place as opposed to many. At this concrete place the Lord "causes his name to dwell," and thus communes with His people by blessing and hearing them as they gather for sacrifice and praise. The character of this "place" suggests an eschatological here and now; yet without specified identification of the place, it remains in the future not-yet. This is amplified by the location of Yahweh in relation to this "place." Chapter 26 recounts the divine conversation with man by way of "the priest" (26:3) who is at "the place that Yahweh your God will choose" (26:2). The prayer that follows highlights the eschatological importance of the place, "Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel and the ground that you have given us, as you swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey" (26:15). Here the "place" and the "land" and "heaven" all align in relation to Yahweh. This suggests that Yahweh himself is both "now and not yet" for Israel and dwelling with Israel.

III. Homiletic Eschatology

Robert Alter once asserted, "The Book of Deuteronomy is the most sustained deployment of rhetoric in the Bible."⁴¹ In view of eschatological expectations, we will tend most closely to the eschatological vocabulary of time.

⁴⁰ J.G. McConville, "Time, Place, and the Deuteronomical Altar-Law," *Time and Place in Deuteronomy*, ed. J.G. McConville and J.G. Millar, JSOTSS 179 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 89-139.

⁴¹ Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 869.

Past: Yahweh promised (שבַּע), delivered/gave (וָתַן), brought up/out (אָצַיַּ), multiplied (הִבְרִי), and bids Israel to remember (רִכַּז).

Present: Yahweh commands (הוֹצִי) Israel to do (עָשָׂה), hear (שָׁמַע), keep (שָׁמַר), tell (רָבַד), fear (אָרַיַּ), and impress [upon their children] (שָׁנַן).

And future: Yahweh will cause them to enter (אוֹבֵד), possess (לָהֵן), keep (שָׁמַר), and love (אָהַב).

These verbs present the hearer with the full spectrum of time, rhetorically intended to elicit a confession. The rhetorical aim is to persuade Israel to live within the life of God himself.

The Past

Whether or not Deuteronomy is modeled closely after the ancient vassal treaties, the opening chapters certainly present a historical prologue to the covenant at hand. As Millar notes, "The function of these chapters [Deuteronomy 1-3] is to bring Israel to the place of decision on the edge of the land."⁴² This calls for a remembrance of what Yahweh has done and, consequently, who Israel is. Remembering, however, is not simply an intellectual recollection.⁴³ It is rather participation—the recollection of the past informs and shapes the present. Therefore, by presenting the deeds of Yahweh, those memories of old teach, comfort, and guide those gathered at present. Remembering Yahweh's works is Israel's active participation in what those works delivered—namely, life in the land under his blessing. The alternative is to forget. Recall these two terms as the structural devices for chapter eight:

You shall remember Yahweh your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm His covenant that He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. And if you forget Yahweh your God and go after other gods and serve them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. (Deut 8:18-19)

The crucial deeds pertain to the elective work of Yahweh: his promise to the Patriarchs and his deliverance out of Egypt. "Promise" or "swear" (שבַּע), though used consistently for the Lord's promise of old, it "virtually always referred to the future."⁴⁴ That is, the promise made in the past bears

⁴² Millar, *Time and Place*, 15-88.

⁴³ H. Eising, "zakhar," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Volume IV, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980): 64-82.

⁴⁴ C.A. Keller, "שבַּע to swear," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament: Volume 3*, 292-1297 ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann, tr. M.E. Biddle (Peabody: Hendrickson, 997): 1293.

with it the expectation of fulfillment in the future. In addition, and proper to his function as prophet, Moses' emphasis upon the promise puts the onus on Yahweh to remember (Deut 9:27).⁴⁵ This intercessory role leads to Yahweh's gracious remembrance of the promise, and subsequent deliverance. Yahweh's remembering is performative—as he remembers the promise he enacts that which he swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The promised deliverance is most clearly portrayed in the exodus account. Yahweh defines himself by this act: "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt [מֵאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם], out of the house of slavery" (5:6). Clearly, this is a work done in the past. However, the rhetoric of this refrain suggests that this was not the end of the story. The bringing out was the means to an end, an end not yet realized: "And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers" (6:23). Here, the promise and event of old are linked with the land of the future. Past and future meet in order to provoke a confession in the present hearing.

The Present

When the author addresses Israel in the present, it often appears in the form of command: do, hear, keep, etc. Most famous is the Shema': "Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is one. You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (6:4). To hear is to obey. The fact that God speaks and they are given to listen (and not die) necessitates a gracious presence: "Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live?" (4:33). שמע, therefore, never appears alone—it always carries with it or implies עשה and שמר.⁴⁶ "When you *hear/obey* [תשמע] the

⁴⁵ Similarly, the *anamnesis* of the Eucharist: "do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19). Such remembrance, certainly an act of recollection too, is chiefly the remembrance by *Yahweh* of His people. Two examples suffice: first, for the Passover, von Rad notes, "When Israel ate the Passover, clad as for a journey, staff in hand, sandals on her feet, and in the haste of departure (Ex 12:11), she was manifestly doing more than merely remembering the Exodus: she was entering into the saving event of the Exodus: itself and participating in it in a quite 'actual' way" (*Message of the Prophets*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker [New York: Harper & Row, 1962], 82). The second example is Noah's rainbow: "And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature . . . When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth'" (Gen 9:12-16).

⁴⁶ Referring to the triad: שמע-to hear, שמר-to keep, and זכר-to remember, Wentz affirms, "All three verbs map the relationship of God to His chosen people and are intimately intertwined. One cannot, from the perspective of Moses, do one of these and

voice of Yahweh your God, to keep [רמזשך] his commandments and his statutes that are written in this Book of the Law" (30:10). Such obedience rendered to the word of Yahweh both prepares the people for entering the land, as well as results from their having been brought in. This obedience, both hearing/obeying and keeping/doing, is necessary for Israel's entrance as well as their remaining within the land. However, what we find (both in Deuteronomy as well as in the accounts of the former prophets) is that the people are not obedient. Nevertheless, Yahweh is—He is obedient to His sworn oath.

The Future

The future discourse centers on the land that Yahweh is giving to them: that Israel enter and possess it as their inheritance. Millar notes, "The key to the future is described in terms of obedience in the present informed by remembrance of the past."⁴⁷ Nevertheless, Deuteronomy safeguards against what we might call "works-based entrance." Olson rightly states, "The present form of Deuteronomy [refutes] a mechanical view of retribution and reward."⁴⁸ Notable here are chapters 9–10, which are designed to convince Israel that any future livelihood depends upon a trust and upholding of Yahweh's covenant of grace.⁴⁹ Left to themselves what do you get?—the incident of the Golden Calf (9:13–29)! Why recount this incident? Two reasons: first, the ostentatious disobedience (notice the immediacy after receiving and vowing to keep the Ten Words and its blatant contradiction of the First Commandment, not to make graven images); and second, to highlight (by contrast and, therefore, serious reflection) the words spoken at the beginning of this chapter, "You are to cross over the Jordan today" (9:1). Their entering must not be to their credit: "Do not say in your heart, after Yahweh your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that Yahweh has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that Yahweh is driving them out before you" (9:4). It is Yahweh's land in the first place (Lev 25:23) and so it is his to give.

This future giving, entering, and inheriting/possessing is not realized in the present book. The promise is so emphasized that the land almost seems palpable—and to Moses, visible—but nonetheless, not yet theirs.

not the other two" (157). F. García-López ("*shamar*," TDOT XV: 279–305) notes that this combination of שמר and עשה denote "one of the primary motifs of Deuteronomy" (291).

⁴⁷ Millar, *Time and Place*, 16.

⁴⁸ Olson, *Deuteronomy*, 56.

⁴⁹ Robert O'Connell, "Deuteronomy IX 7–X 7, 10–11: Panelled Structure, Double Rehearsal, and the Rhetoric of Covenant Rebuke," *Vetus Testamentum* 42.4 (1992): 509.

Thus Millar observes,

It seems that what we have here is not only salvation history, but an exposition of the way of salvation in the present and the future, based on the national experience of the past. The events of the past and the places of the past coalesce with those of the present, so that Israel might walk in the ways of Yahweh.⁵⁰

The rhetoric of past, present, and future presents itself to Israel—will they rightly remember and faithfully trust that what Yahweh has promised He will do? And as we readers and hearers of Deuteronomy are written into the narrative, we too are presented with our response to Yahweh.

IV. Conclusion

As part of the now and not yet eschatology, one is called to continual repentance—hearing and keeping. Whereas the account of the law in Exodus may be seen as representing a “once and done” approach to the covenant, Deuteronomy subjects itself to all people at all times, hoping to elicit renewal and conversion continually. Now, Deuteronomy should not be set against the Exodus account; but rather, when read canonically together, they encapsulate the whole assurance of the people: they are, in fact, still the people of God.⁵¹ This is the purpose of the eschatological structure. Not only the rhetorical self-reflection, evoking a confession to hear and keep, but also the clear promise that whoever is gathered around this word is the people that God has summoned for himself in the Promised Land.

The notion of a journey seems to best characterize the eschatology that Deuteronomy presents: there is a fixed reality, an institutional promise, but this reality is always the propelling motivation toward its fulfillment. We should note especially that the Israel Moses addresses is a far different Israel than the one standing at Horeb. Nevertheless, Moses preaches a “for-you” sermon. He permits his words boundless course among *all* Israel—all generations, all peoples, even us and those still to come! All of Israel, including the church today, is to consider herself at the banks of the Jordan. She is to hear what *Torah* declares, keep its statutes, judgments,

⁵⁰ Millar, *Time and Place*, 32.

⁵¹ To read Deuteronomy and Exodus as mutually exclusive models is similar to placing Baptism over against the Eucharist. If, to simplify somewhat, Baptism represents the “once and done” nature of salvation, the Eucharist then serves as the continual converting agent, reminding the people of the continual need for deliverance. Both Exodus and Deuteronomy (as well as Baptism and the Eucharist) relate the eschatological hope that what is had now will come to fruition.

and commandments, remember all that Yahweh has done (his promise and deliverance) and consequently enter and possess the land. "Deuteronomy, therefore," argues Childs, "serves as a commentary on how future generations are to approach the law and it functions as a guide in establishing its canonical role."⁵² Deuteronomy clearly encourages such a reading: "It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before Yahweh our God, and with whoever is not here with us today" (Deut 29:14-15).

That covenant of old includes us as well. And it is precisely this journey, this standing on the brink of the Jordan that allows us to best hear the cry of John the Baptist. He is the one who connects the Old and New by standing in the Jordan! His bony-finger points across the Jordan to the One who "takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). To cross the Jordan with John, by way of a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk 1:4), is to truly enter, possess, and inherit the Promised Land! Jesus Christ is the inheritance promised long ago to our fathers. He is the one who faithfully hears, keeps, and does the *Torah* perfectly, fully, and best of all, he does it for you.

⁵² Childs, *Introduction*, 224.

