

THE CREED
AN EXEGESIS OF DEUTERONOMY 26:5 - 9
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Deut. 26:5-9 is the ancient Israelite creed. What was its purpose, and what role did it play in ancient Israel ? Then, what does this ancient Israelite creed mean in our present world ? This paper will investigate these questions, relying primarily on the theories of G. Von Rad and M. Noth.

First we must decide the text in the next chapter. In chapter 3 we shall study the message of Deut. 26:5-9 and its context in the Old Testament. Then we shall turn to the relation between the creed and the Israelite community in chapter 4, looking then at traditional criticism in chapter 5. We shall study terminology in chapter 6. The paper will conclude with theological reflection about what the ancient Israelite creed says to us in the present world.

In conclusion, Deut. 26:5-9 in the cult played the central role to form amphictyony, which was the league of twelve tribes of Israel, because most people who experienced the exodus died on the way to Canaan. Anyone who shared common remembrance of exodus became a real member of the Israelite community through participating in the worship and confessing the creed, regardless of his blood or experience. The creed Deut. 26:5-9 is important in uniting Israel historically as well as racially.

CHAPTER 2

TEXT DECISION

This paper decide The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocripha; Revised Standard Version as the text, comparing this with the following English translated Bibles: The Holy Bible; Authorized King James Version, The Good News Bible; Today's English Version.

"And you shall make response before the Lord your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the Lord the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an out-stretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; and he brought us into his place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey (Deut. 26:5-9).

CHAPTER 3

TEXT CRITICISM

Deuteronomy 26:5-9

Deut. 26:5-9 is the basic creed for ancient Israel. It has four main points.¹ First, "A wandering Aramean was my father." This means anyone who confesses this creed becomes a religious descendant of Jacob, "A wandering Aramean."² "Israel is then characterized both as an individual representing the entire nation and as a community of individual Israelites."³ So "he identifies himself with the community."⁴ Second, the "wandering Aramean" goes down into Egypt and becomes a great nation, then they are oppressed by the Egyptians. Third, when they cry out to the Lord of their father, Yahweh rescues them from the oppression with a "mighty hand and an outstretched arm." Fourthly, Yahweh leads and guides them into "a land of flowing with milk and honey."

¹Murray Newman, "Deuteronomy," Crossroad 15 (October - December 1964), 25.

²Calum M. Carmichael, The Law of Deuteronomy (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), p.249

³Ibid.

⁴Gerhard Von Rad, The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays, trans. E.W. Trueman Dicken (New York:Mcgraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), p. 5.

The theme of this creed, which is the God's action in the historical events, is proclaimed in the cult over and over¹. "The most important item of the whole ceremonial is the declaration to be made by the offerer."² By Von Rad, this creed has signs of the earliest time. For example, "wandering" comes from Gen. 20:13,³ and "the Lord brought us out of Egypt" is the oldest and the most generally used confessional form.⁴ "They recapitulate the main events in the saving history from the time of the patriarchs (by the Aramean Jacob is meant) down to the conquest."⁵

The exodus is the most crucial "God's redemptive activity" in the Israelite history⁶. It is the foundation of the Israelite faith, and the creed in their cult is used to transmit the memory of this exodus from generation to generation. The exodus is also interpreted as the election of nation by Yahweh. The tribe who experienced the exodus was Joseph,⁷ but the creed transmitted the religious memory to another tribes of Israel who did not go through the exodus. The creed in the cult is, thus, an important medium to transmit and share common remembrance for the Israelite people.

¹Ibid.

²Gerhard Von Rad, Deuteronomy: A Commentary, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), p. 158.

³Ibid., p. 159.

⁴Gerhard Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 1:121.

⁵Ibid., 1:122.

⁶Von Rad, The Problem of the Hexateuch and other Essays, p. 2.

⁷The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. 1976 ed., s.v. "Amphictyony," by M.C. Astour.

The Israelite people regarded the land of Canaan as Jahweh's land,¹ which Yahweh had promised to give her fathers as "a land flowing with milk and honey," so they could "rest" there. Only Yahweh could give the land of Canaan to the Israelite people, and only Yahweh could let them "rest." The promise of the land of Canaan have been continued from the God's promise to "A wandering Aramean."²

Comparison

There are some parallel creeds with Deut. 26:5-9 in the Old Testament. These are Deut. 6:20-24; Joshua 24:2b-13; Psalm 78, 105, 135, and 136. This paper examines Deut. 6:20-24 and Joshua 24:2b-13, relying on the theory of Von Rad.

When your son asks you in time to time, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances which the Lord our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes; and he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land which he swore to give to our fathers. And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as at this day (Deut. 6:20-24).

This is a creed which has a style of explaining the faith to Israelite children. Though this creed has stereotyped forms,³ the theme is similar to Deut. 26:5-9, that is the God's redemption of the Israel. Von Rad also points out both creeds of Deut. 26:5-9 and Deut. 6:20-24 lack the events of Mt. Sinai.⁴

¹Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, 1:299

²W. Eugene March, "Elected to Remember," Austin Seminary Bulletin 93 (November 1977):5-13.

³Von Rad, The problem of the Hexateuch and other Essays, p. 5.

⁴Ibid., p. 6.

'Your fathers lived of old beyond the Euphra'tes, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac; and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. And I gave Esau the hill country of Se'ir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. And I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in the midst of it; and afterwards I brought you out. Then I brought your father out of Egypt, and you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your fathers with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. And when they cried to the Lord, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did to Egypt; and you lived in the wilderness a long time. Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan; they fought with you, and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you. Then Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel; and he sent and invited Balaam the son of Be'or to curse you, but I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he blessed you; so I delivered you out of his hand. And you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the men of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Per'izzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Gir'gashites, the Hivites, and the Jeb'usites; and I gave them into your hand. And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and cities which you had not built, and you dwell therein; you eat the fruit of vineyards and oliveyards you did not plant (Joshua 24:2b-13)."

Joshua 24:2b-13 is named as "Joshua's oration to the congregation at Shechem."¹ In this creed, Deut. 24:2b is similar to Deut. 26:5b. These explain about their ancestors.

¹Ibid.

This creed is longer than the other two creeds, Deut. 26:5-9 and Deut. 6:20-24, but the basic themes are same,¹ that is, the God's redemptive action in the Israelite history. In the creed of Joshua 24:2b-13, the story of Balaam and the hornet are added, so "we are thus faced with the remarkable fact that this genre allowed of the interpretation of small details."² These creed were pronounced in a lofty significant situation in a cultic ceremony.³ Some historical events are interpreted and added according to the theme of the creed, which is common to three creeds. Also, all three creeds don't refer to the event of Mr. Sinai.⁴

Context

Deuteronomy is made up several independent original Deuteronomomic material. J. Wellhausen to R. Pfeiffer insists that the original Deuteronomy is within chapter 12 through chapter 26.⁵ Deuteronomy primarily did not have chapter 1 through chapter 3(4) and some parts of chapter 31 and chapter 34, but these were added when Deuteronomy was compiled into the Deuteronomomic History about 550 B.C..⁶

Deuteronomy 4:44-30:20 was also regarded as a whole book, which was formed in the earliest time in the history of the compilation.⁷ Deut. 26:5-9, anyway, belongs to the original parts of Deuteronomy.

¹Von Rad, Old Testament Theology, 1:123.

²Von Rad, The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays, p. 7.

³Ibid., p. 8.

⁴Ibid.

⁵The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 1962 ed., s.v. "Deuteronomy," by G. Von Rad.

⁶Foster R. McCurley, ed., Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Proclamation Commentaries (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 19.

⁷Ibid., p 20.

CHAPTER 4
HISTORICAL SITUATION (SITZ-IM-LEBEN)
Age and Situation

We turn to the age and situation around Deut. 26:5-9. It would date about 1250-1200 B.C. that Moses spoke and Israel entered into Canaan.¹ Some scholars insist that compilation of Deuteronomy was done as late as the fifth century B.C., on the other hand, a few date it in the tenth or eleventh century B.C.² But, most scholars regard the age of its compilation as the seventh century B.C..³

Some parts of the "Book of the Law" were found out in the eighteenth year of King Josiah's dominion (622-21 B.C.).⁴ Then Josiah carried out the centralization of the worship by using this book.⁵ "In all probability, this 'Book of the Law' was identical with the original form of the deuteronomic law which is preserved in the Old Testament."⁶ Deuteronomy has an opposite quality to both the Canaanitic natural religion and the syncretism.⁷ When Judah who were in the seventh century B.C. listened to Deuteronomy, they felt as if they stood before Moses, where they tasted her father's exodus in the thirteenth century B.C..⁸ They renewed their covenant with God. Josiah's centralization of the worship is, thus, rather a religio-political measure than a theological effect, that is, the idea of one Israel before the one Yahweh.⁹

¹Ibid., p.10.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Martin Noth, The History of Israel (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), p. 275.

⁷The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 1962 ed., s.v. "Deuteronomy," by G. Von Rad.

⁸McCurley, ed., Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, p. 10.

⁹The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 1962 ed., s.v. "Deuteronomy," by G. Von Rad.

In those days of the seventh century B.C., the world situation around the Israel was chaotic.¹ When the Assyrian Empire was arising, the barbarian Cimmerians and Scythians were threatening Israel.² After the Assyrians declined, other nations were prosperous.³ The Babylonians under Nabopolassar were trying to control the Near East; on the other hand, Pharaoh Neco was attempting to reestablish the glory of Egypt.⁴

In the midst of this unstable historical situation, King Josiah found the "Book of the Law." Hence the message of Deuteronomy encouraged the Israelite people. Yahweh who had brought out them out of Egypt revealed himself to the Israel in the message. The creed of Deut. 26:5-9 became the basis of their faith in this chaotic milieu.

Cult

The creed of Deut. 26:5-9 is particularly related to the cult of the Feast Weeks.⁵ The creed plays a central significant role in the cult, because the people of Israel convinced that the Yahweh had promised to Abraham about people and land through the creed,⁶ and so Israel is called to covenant with God. This covenant is God's promise to their ancestor and God's redemptive action in the Israelite history.

¹Newman, "Deuteronomy," Crossroad 15, 25.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Von Rad, The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays, p. 43.

⁶John D.W. Watts, "The Deuteronomic Theology," Review and Exposition 74 (Summer 1977):5-13.

The Covenant was renewed and ratified through the ritual action¹. Furthermore, "the renewal of the covenant was central to the Israelite cult."² The ritual itself is originally the constitutive Covenant, that is to say the essence of the Covenant is transmitted by the ritual or the cult.³

The Israelite people try to recall and reemerge the exodus in the cult, where the past events become the reality beyond the age.⁴ Her father's experience is no longer simple historical events; people meet the history of God's redemption through the sacred drama in the worship. Yahweh exists in the cult of the Israel's worship, and the worshiper communicates with Him through the medium of the history.⁵ The communion with God in the cult is the response to His love in their history, namely, the Covenant for Israel.

In summary, Israel; is united by sharing the common memory of God's deliverance, which is based on the Covenant, and the cult in which the creed plays an important role has the functions of transmission and interpretation of the Covenant.

¹Dennis J. McCarthy, Old Testament Covenant (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), p.88.

²Ibid., p. 6.

³Ibid., p. 88.

⁴Von Rad, The Problem of ;the Hexateuch and other Essays, p. 34.

⁵Ibid., p. 35.

Amphictyony

Deut. 26:5-9, the ancient Israelite creed contributed to forming the Israelite amphictyony, which was the league of twelve tribes of Israel. The tribes who did not experience the exodus could be told the Israelite history through the creed and they shared the memory of the exodus. So this section deals with the amphictyony in connection with the creed.

M. Noth insists originally there were "Leah tribes": Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun and Issachar.¹ These six tribes are forerunners and bases of the association of twelve tribes, amphictyony.² Joseph and Benjamin tribes, who themselves went through the exodus, are new-comers to amphictyony.³ So the other six tribes were taught the significant experience by these new-comers, Joseph and Benjamin, through the creed. Joseph tribe had Jacob's oral tradition; Jacob's descendants took over the God's promise for the land of Canaan.⁴ So "Jacob logically became the tribal ancestor of the whole of Israel," through the Joseph tribe.⁵

Israel is united by sharing the common religious experience of the God's deliverance which is due to His promise to their religious ancestor, Jacob. This religious memory is the essence of the creed of Deut. 26:5-9. Through confessing the creed in the cult, the Israelite worshiper became a descendant of Jacob and experienced the exodus.

¹Noth, The History of Israel, p. 89.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 125.

⁵Ibid.

The amphictionic shrine could be kept by each tribe by turns.¹ In those days, the center of the worship was the divine throne of the sacred Ark², whose movable function characterized their religion of the Covenant. So the central place of amphictyony moved. At first it was at Shechem, then at Gilgal, at Bethel, and finally at Shiloh.³ But, it is the cult accompanied with confessing the creed that visibly united twelve tribes, wherever they worshiped.⁴ Additionally, the Holy War also strengthened the union of the amphictyony and the amphictyony became the basis of the Israelite monarchy.⁵

CHAPTER 5

TRADITIONAL CRITICISM

Criticism of Gerhard Von Rad

Von Rad insists that the three creeds, namely, Deut. 6:20-25, 26:5-9 and Joshua 24:2-13 do not refer to the Sinai Tradition.⁶ These creeds, which were earlier than Yahwistic complication, originally functioned to form Hexateuch, and these drew the outline of the salvation history of ancient Israel.⁷

¹The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. 1976 ed., s.v. "Amphictyony," by M.C. Astour.

²Noth, The History of Israel, p. 111.

³McCurley, ed., Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, p. 20.

⁴McCurley, ed., Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, p. 20.

⁵Noth, The History of Israel, p. 91.

⁶Von Rad, The Problem of the Hexateuch and other Essays, p. 8.

⁷Douglas A Knight, Rediscovering the Traditions of Israel, Dissertation Series, no. 9 (Missoula: University of Montana, 1973), p. 99.

These creeds have played the important role in the liturgy in the early Israel.¹ However the absence of the Sinai tradition, by Von Rad, means there are two complexes of traditions which were originally different.² One of them is the complex of the exodus and the conquest of the Promised Land, another one is the complex in the Sinai event.³ The ancient creed Deut. 26:5-9 expresses this exodus and Canaan tradition which were older than the Sinai.⁴ This creed and the Sinai tradition were mixed as time passed, the latter legitimized the Israelite people. So Von Rad considers that the Hexateuch was compiled not by the "accident" but by the design of Yahwist.⁵ Von Rad suggests radical points: (1) Yahwist inserted the Sinai tradition into the original scheme; and (2) the patriarchal traditions were older, and connected with the conquest tradition.

B. Criticism of Martin Noth

M. Noth opposes the theory of Von Rad which maintains the creative role of the Yahwist in uniting the traditions, then he insists that both the Sinai tradition and the patriarchal traditions were combined in the same bases of J. and E.⁶ Noth supports the liturgical context of the creed, depending on his point of view that the creed build the basis of Tetrateuch.⁷ By M. Noth, when the tribes were settled in Palestine, Israel started to collect the oral traditions, that is, patriarchal migrations, slavery

¹Ibid., p.100. ²Ibid., pp. 102-3. ³Ibid., p. 103.

⁴Ibid., p. 104. ⁵Ibid., p. 106.

⁶The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. 1976 ed., s.v. "Credo, Ancient Israelite," by G. I. Durham.

⁷Ibid.

in Egypt, exodus, wilderness wanderings, the peaceful and militaristic immigrations into Palestine, as these oral traditions had belonged to each separate tribe or group.¹ So these traditions, as a whole, did not originally belong to Israel.² Thus these traditions were compiled as the product of tribal confederacy in the cult.³ Noth states the various tribes were united to an amphictyony.⁴ He is interested in the distinctive character of Israelite prehistory more than any other people.⁵

Von Rad rejects an "accidental" process of growth in compiling Hexateuch, while Noth regards the compilation as a long, gradual process of agglomeration.⁶ In short, Von Rad stresses the cult and the Yahwist, and Noth emphasizes amphictyonic community in the cult.⁷ However, there are some resemblances and commonalities between Von Rad and Noth. These are "the central importance of the cult" and "the prime traditio principle in Israel consists of interpretation and actualization."⁸

¹Knight, Rediscovering the Traditions of Israel, p.168.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 170.

⁵Ibid., pp. 170-71.

⁶Ibid., p. 176.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

CHAPTER 6
WORDS STUDY
Aramean

Now we study the word "Aramean." The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible tells us the Arameans were descendants of Shem about the twelveth century B.C., and they were living between the western bank of the Euphrates and Palmyra in the Syrian desert.¹ During the twelveth century B.C., the Hittite empire collapsed into smaller kingdoms, and the Egyptian power decreased, and the Mitanni kingdom broke up. Then the Arameans moved into the boundary of Mesopotamian kingdoms and northern and southern Syria.² They were originally nomads, though they were occasionally merchants, peasants, shepherds, soldiers and bandits.³ The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible also tells us "in Late Assyrian times, it means simply 'nomads'."⁴ Nomadic Arameans were also regarded as the group of "invaders."⁵ In the Old Testament, Isaac's wife Rebekah, Jacob, Leah and Rachel were Arameans, and they were ancestors to the Hebrew people.

Hebrew

We turn to the word "Hebrew." Although the people who were in Egypt are called the Hebrew, by The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, "Hebrew" etymologically means "one from the other side", in short, immigrant.⁶

¹The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 1975 ed., s.v. "Aramean," by L.L.Walker.

²Ibid. ³Ibid.

⁴The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 1962 ed., s.v. "Aramean," by R.A.Bowman.

⁵Ibid.

⁶The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 1975 ed., s.v. "Hebrew," by J. Jocz.

The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible also explains that "Habiru" or "Hapiru", originally, doesn't mean an ethnic term, "but rather the denotation of a social class, though this is very uncertain."¹ M. Noth notes that "Habiru" is the same word as "Hebrew."² Habiru is an descriptive appellation of a juridic-social position.³ The position of Hairu or Hebrew is, in short, "out law." "When used appellatively, 'Hebrew' has something of its older meaning of 'out law'.⁴ Hebrew in the ancient Orient were people or the group with inferior legal rights and small economy in the civilized lands.⁵ They had also restless nomadic elements.⁶ Thus, Hebrew originally signified the social class of servitude or slavery, a contrast to the freeman, but the word "Hebrew" changed to be used as ethnic term as time passed.⁷

All Israelite were Hebrews, but the Hebrew were not always the Israelite; the difference was principally their religion.⁸ The Hebrew, to be exact, means a branch of the Habiru.⁹ So the Habiru people turned to the Hebrew, and then the Israelite through the religion.

¹The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 1962 ed., "Habiru," by A. Haldar.

²Noth, The History of Israel, p. 34.

³The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible.

⁴C. H. J. De Geus, The Tribes of Israel (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1976), p. 185.

⁵Noth, The History of Israel, p. 34

⁶Ibid.

⁷The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, 1975 ed., s.v. "Hebrew," by J. Jocz.

⁸Geus, The Tribes of Israel, p. 16.

⁹The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, 1962 ed., "Habiru, Hapiru," by A. Haldar.

In conclusion, the Israelite people has two roots: the Habiru (Abraham and Issac); and the Aramean (Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah).¹ In Deut. 26:5-9, "a wandering Aramean" and "a nation", that is, the Hebrew in Egypt were designed to unit these two roots. They were combined into one ethnic nation through the creed. Israel was formed on the foundation of the creed in the liturgy.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The ancient Israelite creed of Deut. 26:5-9 in the cult played the central role to form the amphictyony, which was the league of twelve tribes of Israel. Most Israelite people who confessed the creed of Deut. 26:5-9 did not experience the exodus because of two reasons: (1) most people who experienced the exodus died on the way to Canaan (numbers 32:11-13), (2) only Jacob and Benjamin tribes in twelve tribes did go through the exodus. But through participating in the worship and confessing the creed they shared the memory of the exodus and became the descendants of "A wandering Aramean", Jacob. The Israelite is a nation formed by their religion. The creed transmitted the religious experience generation to generation and people to people among different tribes. Deut. 26:5-9 is the memory of the Yahweh's salvation for the Israelite people. So, whenever they were brought to crises they expected Yahweh to help them in the sameway as their creed described about their ancestors. Furthermore the creed protected the Israelite people from the Canaanitic natural religion and syncretism.

¹Geus, The Tribes of Israel, p. 31.

What does the ancient creed speaks to us ? We did not experience the exodus and we are not the descendants of Jacob, but through the creed in the cult we are transmitted the exodus and we share the memory just like the ancient Israelite people. We religiously experience the exodus in the worship. Through learning of Yahweh's redemptive action in the past we know our own salvation by God. We can become members of the new Israel, that is, Christian, regardless of our blood or experience.

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