CUTHEANS OR CHILDREN OF JACOB?
THE ISSUE OF SAMARITAN ORIGINS IN 2 KINGS 17

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The long discussion of Israel’s exile in 2 Kings 17 features a series of Deuteronomistic reflections on the causes of the northern kingdom’s defeat.¹ Presenting the final course of history as the actualisation of the covenant curses, the Deuteronomistic reflections depict the effects of the Assyrian deportations as definitive for the northern tribes.² As with the later fall of the southern kingdom centuries later (586 BCE), history stops when the population exits the land (2 Kings 24–25). In the book of Kings, exile is not simply the nadir of history, but also its end.³ Or so it seems.

The very fact that the story does not end with the Israelites’ expulsion from the land is important.⁴ That the writers of 2 Kings 17 feel compelled to discuss the aftermath of the Assyrian exile is significant, because it departs from the standard Deuteronomistic, historiographic pattern of focusing solely upon Israel’s history within

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¹ It is a pleasure to offer this paper as a tribute to Graeme Auld. In my experience, Graeme has been one of the most creative and good-humoured scholars in the field. In the wake of the manuscript discoveries at Qumran, Graeme has rightly stressed the intimate relations between so-called lower criticism (textual criticism of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the MT, and the LXX) and higher criticism (especially source criticism and redaction criticism). My hope is that this study, which reflects two of Graeme’s interests—textual criticism and the development of the Deuteronomistic story of Kings—will do honour to his many contributions to scholarship.

² Of all the assertions made about the Israelite exile (2 Kgs 17.6, 18, 20, 23; 18.9–12), the one in 2 Kgs 17.18 is the most explicit about a (temporarily) empty northern land. The repeated blanket declarations of exile, including this comprehensive declaration, were influential on later tradition. Note, for instance, how Josephus (Ant 9.279) speaks of the Assyrian monarch sending ‘all of the people (panta ton laon) to Media and Persia’.

³ On the threat of exile, see Deut 4.25–28; 6.13–15; 28.36–37, 63; 29.26–27; Josh 23.13, 15, 16; 1 Sam 12.25; 1 Kgs 9.7; 14.11, 15. With the religious course of the northern kingdom in mind (e.g., 1 Kgs 12.28; 14.9), it is relevant that most of these curses have to do with the worship of other gods (Deut 6.14–15; 28.36–37, 63–68; 29.17–27; Josh 23.15–16; 1 Kgs 9.7; 14.11, 15).

⁴ Given the normal Deuteronomistic pattern of beginning the story with the people’s entrance into the land and ending the story when the people exit the land, one would expect that coverage of northern affairs would terminate with the fall of the northern kingdom.
the land. To take one example, 2 Kgs 15.27–29 mentions that the residents of various sites in Gilead and the Galilee, ‘the entire region of Naphtali’, were deported by Tiglath-pileser III (2 Kgs 15.29).5 In the subsequent narratives dealing with the northern kingdom, these exiled northern Israelites are never heard from again. To take a second example, the writers of Kings mention Yhwh’s dispatching bands of Chaldeans, Edomites, Aramaeans, Moabites and Ammonites against Judah in the final decades of the Judahite kingdom (2 Kgs 24.2). The activities of these groups are signs of the troubles that the Judahite monarchy faces as it nears dissolution. Nevertheless, the text does not discuss what happens to these foreign elements after the Judahites exit the land.6

The historiographical choice of limiting coverage to the experience of Israelites and Judahites in the land makes the exception to the rule in 2 Kings 17 all the more intriguing. Two commentaries on the aftermath of the Assyrian invasions (2 Kgs 17.24–34a, 34b–40) follow the Deuteronomistic commentaries on the fall of Israel. Both of the narratives dealing with the conditions in the former northern kingdom are filled with Deuteronomistic vocabulary and clichés. The second of these commentaries (2 Kgs 17.34b–40) is the topic of my short study.7

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6 In this context, see also the blanket declarations of exile in 2 Kgs 23.27; 24.3, 10 (M. Weinfeld, Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972], p. 347).