

No Future without Moses: The Disastrous End of 2 Kings 22–25 and the Chance of the Moab Covenant (Deuteronomy 29–30)

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This article explores the question of why the history of Israel and Judah, according to the books of Kings, ends in disaster (2 Kings 25). Although this question has been intensely discussed, especially since Martin Noth's *Überlieferungs-geschichtliche Studien* (1943), no entirely convincing solution has been offered. The argument suggests a new explanation of the ending of Kings from the perspective of its textual pragmatics. The narrative of the finding of the "book of the torah" during Josiah's reign (2 Kings 22–23) is seen to refer readers emphatically to Deuteronomy. The laconically disastrous end of 2 Kings 24–25 proves the accuracy of Moses' predictions of exile. Readers who wish to know about the possibilities for Israel's future are bound to reread Deuteronomy 29–30, the only text in which Moses refers to the return to the promised land (Deut 30:1–10). They are thereby taken into the dynamics of the Moab covenant (Deuteronomy 29–30). Kings does not console its readers with a happy ending but forces them to turn to Moses' rhetoric of blessing and curse and to make their decision between life and death (Deut 30:15–20).

One of the puzzles of the Hebrew Bible has been the question of why the history of Israel and Judah, according to the books of Kings, ends in disaster (2 Kings 25). Most scholars would probably agree that this ending can be reasonably

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understood as a product of exilic times.¹ The final chapters provide an etiology of exile, while the very last verses, which mention the release and noble treatment of Jehoiachin (25:27–30), may encourage readers to see exile as a state of unexpected opportunities.² Yet many scholars assume that the text of Kings was still open to redaction during Persian times.³ It would have been a simple literary procedure to add a few verses to the end of ch. 25, comparable to the solution that the end of Chronicles provides (2 Chr 36:22–23), to give the entire history of Israel a much more positive interpretation. Such a conclusion might have opened up for readers the hope of a better future.

Yet, at the end of the story, we find ourselves stuck in disaster. Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed and plundered (2 Kgs 25:9–10, 13–17); the upper class of Judah is deported to Babylon (25:11); and the rest of the people have fled to Egypt (25:26). It would not entirely console any contemporary reader that finally the Judean king was released and received an allotment of food “for each day—all the days of his life,” as the story is concluded (25:30). Readers are left alone with the burning question as to what the future of God’s people could be. Why was there no *Fortschreibung* added to the ending of Kings to indicate clearly the restoration of the people?

I will suggest an explanation of the intriguing ending of Kings from the perspective of its textual pragmatics, which direct readers toward the book of Deuteronomy. The article will unfold in five steps. After a look at previous interpretations

¹ Most recently, David Janzen argues for a dating in exilic times, after 562 B.C.E. (*The Violent Gift: Trauma’s Subversion of the Deuteronomistic History’s Narrative* [LHBOTS 561; London: T&T Clark, 2012], esp. 24–25). See also idem, “The Sins of Josiah and Hezekiah: A Synchronic Reading of the Final Chapters of Kings,” *JSOT* 37 (2013): 349–70. In the latter work, Janzen sees in the final chapters a message directed to King Jehoiachin in exile. Many others see in 2 Kings 24–25 an exilic redactor at work, e.g., Hermann-Josef Stipp, “Remembering Josiah’s Reform in Kings,” in *Remembering and Forgetting in Early Second Temple Judah* (ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin; FAT 85; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 225–38, esp. 233; Marvin A. Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah: The Lost Messiah of Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), esp. 33–39; Erik Eynikel, *The Reform of King Josiah and the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (OtSt 33; Leiden: Brill, 1996), esp. 364.

² See Thomas Römer, “Transformations in Deuteronomistic and Biblical Historiography: On ‘Book Finding’ and Other Literary Strategies,” *ZAW* 109 (1997): 11, where Römer points out parallels with Genesis 37–50, Daniel 2–6, and Esther. See also idem, “Die Anfänge jüdischer Geschichtsschreibung im sogenannten Deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerk” in *Die Apostelgeschichte im Kontext antiker und frühchristlicher Historiographie* (ed. Jörg Frey et al.; BZNW 162; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 51–76, esp. 75. David Janzen attributes the “maddening” vagueness at the end of the book to “a time frame when it was impossible to tell what the fate of the Davidide would be.” Therefore, the end should be written “in the exile—or possibly in the early post-exilic period” (“An Ambiguous Ending: Dynastic Punishment in Kings and the Fate of the Davidides in 2 Kings 25.27–30,” *JSOT* 33 [2008]: 57, 58).

³ Compare Thomas Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical and Literary Introduction* (2nd ed.; London: T&T Clark, 2007), 165–83.

of the ending of Kings, I will analyze intertextual connections between the final chapters of Kings and Deuteronomy. I will then discuss Moses' outlook on Israel's future according to Deuteronomy. Against this backdrop, I will be able to suggest a pragmatic understanding of 2 Kings 22–25 and add some hermeneutical perspectives.

1. Previous Interpretations of the Ending of Kings

Martin Noth's theory of the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH) prominently emphasized the intricate literary and theological connection between Deuteronomy and the historiography in Kings in his *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (1943).⁴ Noth interpreted the intention of DtrH with strong emphasis on its ending. According to him, the primary intention of DtrH was to explain the end of history as divine judgment. DtrH, he says, does not envision any hope for the future but presents a definite end. Noth's decisive passage reads:

Finally we must raise the question of what historical developments Dtr. anticipated for the future. Admittedly his theme is the past history of his people, as written down and, as far as he was concerned, at an end. However, the pre-exilic prophets saw the catastrophe which they predicted not as a final end but as the beginning of a new era. Similarly, Dtr. could have seen the end of the period of history which he depicts as the end of a self-contained historical process, without thinking that his people could go no further; and he could have used the interpretative summaries, which he adds, to answer the question that readily suggests itself: would not the history which he wrote attain its full meaning in the future, in conditions which had yet to develop out of the ruins of the old order, the more so because in Dtr.'s time people were intensely hopeful that a new order of things would emerge from all these catastrophes? It is very telling that Dtr. does not take up this question and does not use the opportunity to discuss the future goal of history. Clearly he saw the divine judgement which was acted out in his account of the external collapse of Israel as a nation as something final and definitive and he expressed no hope for the future, not even in the very modest and simple form of an expectation that the deported and dispersed people would be gathered together.⁵

⁴Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien: Die sammelnden und bearbeitenden Geschichtswerke im Alten Testament* (2nd ed.; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1957), 3–110.

⁵Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (trans. J. Doull et al.; 2nd ed.; JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 142–43. The original reads: "Endlich wäre an Dtr noch die Frage zu richten, was er über den von ihm aus gesehen *künftigen Fortgang der Geschichte* gedacht hat. Zwar war sein Thema ja die vergangene und für ihn abgeschlossen vorliegende Geschichte seines Volkes. Aber wenn man bedenkt, daß die vorexilischen Propheten die von ihnen angekündigte Katastrophe nicht als ein letztes Ende, sondern als den Ausgangspunkt einer neuen Zeit betrachtet hatten, so hätte immerhin auch Dtr in dem Endpunkt seiner Geschichtsdarstellung wohl den

Contrary to Noth's view, Gerhard von Rad favors a quite optimistic reading in his *Theologie des Alten Testaments I* (1st ed., 1957).⁶ He sees DtrH as a "comprehensive confession of Israel's guilt" and as a "doxology of judgment."⁷ "Yet, closing as it does with the note about the favour shown to Jehoiachin (11 Kings xxv. 27ff.), it points to a possibility with which Jahweh can resume."⁸

Hans Walter Wolff challenged both Noth's and von Rad's interpretations in "Das Kerygma des deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerks," a paper presented at the University of Göttingen in 1960.⁹ Wolff convincingly pointed out that several aspects of DtrH convey a message of repentance. Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple explicitly envisions Israel praying in the situation of exile and converting to YHWH (1 Kgs 8:46–53).¹⁰ Moreover, this message is most explicit in Moses' speeches in Deut 4:29–31; 30:1–10, which Wolff attributes to a "second hand of the deuteronomistic circle."¹¹ Although he points out an important trace in DtrH that contradicts Noth's pessimistic view of the work's end and aim, Wolff himself does not return to the problem of the ending of the story. If the kerygma of DtrH really is repentance, why is there no trace of this message at its very end?¹²

Abschluß eines geschlossenen Geschichtsverlaufs sehen können, ohne doch damit den Weg seines Volkes an ein letztes Ziel gelangt sein zu lassen, und er hätte in den von ihm beigesteuerten deutenden Zusammenfassungen die Möglichkeit gehabt, auf die naheliegende Frage zu antworten, ob denn der Sinn der von ihm dargestellten Geschichte nicht in der Zukunft, in Dingen, die aus dem Zusammenbruch des alten Bestandes erst noch erwachsen sollten, liege, und dies um so mehr, als in seiner Zeit die Erwartung einer aus den geschehenen Katastrophen hervorgehenden künftigen neuen Ordnung der Dinge durchaus lebendig war. Wenn Dtr jene Frage *nicht* aufgegriffen und die vorhandenen Gelegenheiten, etwas über ein zukünftiges Ziel der Geschichte zu sagen, *nicht* genutzt hat, so ist dieses Schweigen vielsagend genug. Er hat in dem göttlichen Gericht, das sich in dem von ihm dargestellten äußeren Zusammenbruch des Volkes Israel vollzog, offenbar etwas Endgültiges und Abschließendes gesehen und eine Zukunftshoffnung nicht einmal in der bescheidensten und einfachsten Form einer Erwartung der künftigen Sammlung der zerstreuten Deportierten zum Ausdruck gebracht" (Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*, 107–8).

⁶ Von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments I: Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferungen Israels* (Munich: Kaiser, 1957), 332–44.

⁷ Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology I: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; 2nd ed.; OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 337, 343.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁹ Wolff, "Das Kerygma des deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerks," in idem, *Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (2nd ed.; Theologische Bücherei 22; Munich: Kaiser, 1973), 308–24; repr. from *ZAW* 73 (1961): 171–86; von Rad integrated Wolff's suggestion into the second edition of his *Theologie*. Compare von Rad, *Theologie*, 346.

¹⁰ Wolff, "Kerygma," 316–17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 320.

¹² J. Gordon McConville ("Narrative and Meaning in the Books of Kings," *Bib* 70 [1989]: 31–49) touches on our question: "What kind of hope, then, does the narrator offer to his readers?" (p. 47). "In Kings," he claims, "the land is lost, but some measure of restoration is a possibility" (p. 48). Following Wolff, McConville refers to 1 Kgs 8:46–51, which shows that "the people's

Thomas Römer suggests a creative view of the pessimistic end of Kings in his article “Transformations in Deuteronomistic and Biblical Historiography: On ‘Book Finding’ and Other Literary Strategies” (1997).¹³ He adduces a theory of Armin Steil according to which “crisis literature” adopts three types of literary attitudes: the attitude of the “prophet,” the “priest,” and the “mandarin.”¹⁴ The “‘prophet’ offers an eschatological interpretation of the crisis.” The “‘priest’ puts forward a pathological analysis of the crisis and claims for a return to traditional institutions which are legitimated by divine will,” whereas the “‘mandarin’ cannot find ‘direct’ meaning in the crisis, so the only possibility left to him is to adopt a more distant attitude and so to objectivize the crisis with its integration into a historiographical project.”¹⁵ Römer understands the pessimistic end of DtrH as the expression of a negative and distant attitude of a historiographer according to the type of the “mandarin.” While Römer’s suggestion certainly is heuristically valuable (and we shall return to it at the end of this article), it still fails to explain why the end of DtrH, which is perfectly understandable as crisis literature, was not transformed into a work promoting restoration.

This brief survey of a few interpretations of the ending of Kings cannot claim to be in any way comprehensive. It does not venture to reconstruct the elaborate debate about possible redactional layers in DtrH, which would involve especially the followers of Frank Moore Cross and Rudolf Smend on either side of the Atlantic.¹⁶ This, however, would not help to answer the question that is the main concern

repentance is clearly an important precondition of salvation” (ibid.). McConville then points out that Deuteronomy 30 has more to say than does Kings about the restoration of exiles from Judah to their land as well as the manner in which repentance would happen as an act of God’s grace (Deut 30:6). “The question why the author of Kings does not adopt the solution offered by Deuteronomy” (ibid.) is left open by McConville and will be a major point of interest in the present article. Similarly, the present contribution will suggest an answer to the question asked by Yair Hoffman: “Why have the restorative passages been supplemented mainly to the book of Jeremiah, none of them to the Former Prophets, and only one to Deuteronomy (30:1–10)?” (“The Deuteronomist and the Exile,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995] 675).

¹³ Römer, “Transformations,” 4–5; see also idem, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 111–12.

¹⁴ Armin Steil, *Krisensemantik: Wissenssoziologische Untersuchungen zu einem Topos moderner Zeiterfahrung* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 1993).

¹⁵ Römer, “Transformations,” 4–5.

¹⁶ For an overview of the history of research, see Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 13–43; Lewis Vale Alexander, “The Origin and Development of the Deuteronomistic History Theory and Its Significance for Biblical Interpretation” (Ph.D. thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993); Norbert Lohfink, “Recent Discussion on 2 Kings 22–23: The State of the Question,” in *A Song of Power and the Power of Song: Essays on the Book of Deuteronomy* (ed. Duane L. Christensen; Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 3; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 36–61; Helga Weippert, “Das deuteronomistische Geschichtswerk: Sein Ziel und Ende in der neueren Forschung,” *TRu* 50 (1985): 213–49.

of this article: why even the latest redactions allowed the ending of Kings to leave their readers in a situation of collective trauma. To answer this question, we will look at the scene where the end of the story begins.

2. References to Deuteronomy in 2 Kings 22–23

It is the finding of the “book of the torah” (2 Kgs 22:8) that marks the beginning of the end of the history of Judah according to Kings. The content of the book of the torah makes Josiah tear his clothes (22:11) and become aware of the great wrath of יהוה against Judah (22:13). Huldah’s oracle confirms that God indeed is going to bring divine wrath upon Judah (22:15–20).

Leaving aside the historical question whether the book that is claimed to be found in 2 Kings 22 refers to an early stage of Deuteronomy during the times of Josiah,¹⁷ I will discuss this question on a literary level.¹⁸ Commentators since antiquity have identified the book found (22:9) as (some version or part of) Deuteronomy.¹⁹ Indeed, the narrative employs specific expressions that can easily be identified as metatextual references to Deuteronomy.

The first reference to the book in 2 Kgs 22:8 is decisive: “The high priest Hilkiah said to the scribe Shaphan ‘I found the book of the torah in the house of יהוה.’” The expression “book of the torah” (ספר התורה) is used three times in Deuteronomy 28–30 (28:61; 29:20; 30:10)²⁰ referring to the book that Moses writes down in Deut 31:9, which Jean-Pierre Sonnet meticulously analyzed as the “book

¹⁷This question has haunted biblical scholars especially since W. M. L. de Wette’s *dissertatio critica*, which, however, “does not offer the compelling argument that scholars have commonly taken it to do in presuming an identification of Deuteronomy with ‘the book of the Torah’ found by Josiah’s men in 622 BCE, nor was de Wette the first to argue that identification” (Paul B. Harvey and Baruch Halpern, “W. M. L. de Wette’s ‘Dissertatio Critica...’: Context and Translation,” *ZABR* 14 [2008]: 48).

¹⁸For this approach, see David A. Glatt-Gilad, “Revealed and Concealed: The Status of the Law (Book) of Moses within the Deuteronomistic History,” in *Mishneh Todah: Studies in Deuteronomy and Its Cultural Environment. In Honor of Jeffrey H. Tigay* (ed. Nili Sacher Fox, David A. Glatt-Gilad, and Michael J. Williams; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 185–99. There are good reasons to assume that the story of the finding of the book is a literary construction; see Nadav Na’aman, “The ‘Discovered Book’ and the Legitimation of Josiah’s Reform,” *JBL* 130 (2011): 47–62; Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 49–56; Wolfgang Speyer, “Bücherfunde in der Glaubenswerbung der Antike: Mit einem Ausblick auf Mittelalter und Neuzeit,” *Hypomnemata* 24 (1970): 43–124.

¹⁹Cornelius a Lapide, in his early-seventeenth-century commentary, quotes church fathers such as Chrysostom and Athanasius for this opinion (Cornelius a Lapide, *Commentarius in Iosue, Iudicum, Ruth, IV. libros Regum et II. Paralipomenon* [Antwerp, 1664]; see the more commonly available edition of J. M. Peronne [Paris: L. Vivés, 1866], 4:81).

²⁰In 31:26, the book additionally includes the Song of Moses (32:1–43), which is added to the torah according to 31:19, 22, 24.

within the book” in Deuteronomy.²¹ The remaining three occurrences of the expression in Josh 1:8; 8:34; Neh 8:3 all refer to Deuteronomy.²² The expression “book of the torah,” used twice at the beginning of the narrative of the finding of the book in 2 Kgs 22:8, 11, leaves no doubt, therefore, that readers should be reminded of Deuteronomy.

The book is a leitmotif in the narrative on King Josiah (which ends in 2 Kgs 23:30).²³ Although subsequent references to the book do not consistently use the expression ספר התורה, it is clear that it is always the same book, the one discovered, to which the narrative refers. Several times it is briefly called “the book” (22:13, 16; 23:2–3, 24). Huldah refers to the “words that you have heard” (22:18). In the context of the covenant ceremony it is called “book of the covenant” (23:21), and a last reference to the text terms it “the torah of Moses” (2 Kgs 23:25). These frequent references to the book structure the narrative on Josiah and dominate its dynamics.

In addition to the strong connections to Deuteronomy via metatextual references, readers will even more easily recognize other intertextual allusions to Deuteronomy in the narrative.²⁴ The table on the following pages lists a selection of intertextual connections between 2 Kings 22–23 and Deuteronomy, which I will then discuss.²⁵

Josiah expresses his shock after hearing the words of the book: “Great is the wrath of YHWH that is kindled against us, because our ancestors did not listen to the words of this book, to act according to all that is written

²¹Sonnet, *The Book within the Book: Writing in Deuteronomy* (BibInt 14; Leiden: Brill, 1997).

²²The usage of the expression in 2 Chr 34:15 is parallel to 2 Kgs 22:8, whereas 2 Chr 34:14 adds a narrative note, how Hilkiah found “the book of the torah of YHWH through the hand of Moses” (ספר תורת־יהוה ביד־משה).

²³For a classical commentary on the passage, see Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 11; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1988), 277–302; some of the intertextual connections with Deuteronomy are noted by Geert J. Venema, *Reading Scripture in the Old Testament: Deuteronomy 9–10; 31; 2 Kings 22–23; Jeremiah 36; Nehemiah 8* (OtSt 48; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 52–94.

²⁴On criteria to be used in identifying intertextual allusion, see Geoffrey D. Miller, “Intertextuality in Old Testament Research,” *CurBR* 9 (2011): 283–309, esp. 294–98; Serge Frolov and Allen Wright, “Homeric and Ancient Near Eastern Intertextuality in 1 Samuel 17,” *JBL* 130 (2011): 451–71, esp. 452; or the criteria of Manfred Pfister that I summarized in my “Hab 3 in intertextueller und kontextueller Sicht,” *Bib* 85 (2004): 99–108, esp. 99–100. The preceding analysis shows that both qualitative and quantitative criteria (distinctiveness, selectivity, and density) establish extraordinarily strong intertextual relationships between 2 Kings 22–23 and Deuteronomy—in addition to the metatextual reference to the “book of the torah.”

²⁵The remark “exclusive” in the right-hand column of the table notes that the specific expression occurs only in the passages mentioned (in Deuteronomy, Kings, and eventually in a parallel in Chronicles). If the expression occurs once more in the Hebrew Bible, it is indicated in parentheses (+ reference).

2 Kings	2 Chronicles		Deuteronomy
22:13	34:21	“not listen/keep to act according to words written in this book” לא לעשות + דברי + כל + כתוב + הספר הזה	28:58 (exclusive)
22:16		“come/bring upon all words” כל דברים + בוא על	30:1
22:17	34:25	“abandon me” (עזב + suffix -ני)	28:20; 31:16
22:17	34:25	“provoke him/me with the deeds of your/their hands” כעס + במעשה ידיים	31:29 ²⁶
22:19		“to become a desolation” היה לשמה	28:37
23:3	34:31	“to follow YHWH and to keep his commandments” הלך אחר[ני] יהוה + שמר מצותיו	13:5 (exclusive)
23:3	34:31	“the words of this torah/covenant, written in this book” דברי + הכתבים + הספר הזה	28:58 (exclusive)
23:21		“to make a passover for YHWH your god” עשה פסח ליהוה אלהים	16:1 (exclusive) ²⁷
23:24		“detestable things and idols” שקוץ + גלול	29:16 ²⁸
23:24		“torah + written in the book” כתב + ספר + תורה	29:20
23:24		“words of the torah” דברי התורה	17:9; 27:3, 8, 26; 28:58; 29:28; 31:12, 24; 32:46
23:25		“to turn with all one’s heart and all one’s being” שוב בכל-לבב ובכל-נפש	30:2, 10 (+ 1 Kgs 8:48)

²⁶This expression occurs also in 1 Kgs 16:7; Jer 25:6–7; 32:30; 44:8. Jeremiah frequently adopts expressions from Deuteronomy 26–34; see Georg Fischer, “Das Ende von Deuteronomium (Dtn 26–34) im Spiegel des Jeremiabuches,” in *“Gerechtigkeit und Recht zu üben” (Gen 18,19): Studien zur altorientalischen und biblischen Rechtsgeschichte, zur Religionsgeschichte Israels und zur Religionssoziologie. Festschrift für Eckart Otto zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Reinhard Achenbach and Martin Arneth; Beihefte zur ZABR 13; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 281–92.

²⁷Deuteronomy 16:1 (ועשת פסח ליהוה אלהיך) and 2 Kgs 23:21 (ועשו פסח ליהוה אלהיכם) provide the closest parallel to this expression in the Hebrew Bible. 2 Chronicles 30:1 and 5 read לעשות פסח ליהוה אלהי ישראל.

²⁸These two expressions occur combined also in Ezek 20:7–8; 37:23.

2 Kings	2 Chronicles		Deuteronomy
23:25		“with all one’s heart and being and intensity” בכל־לבב ובכל־נפש ובכל־מאד	6:4 (exclusive)
23:26		“YHWH turns from the burning of his anger” שוב יהוה מחרון אפו	13:18 (+ Josh 7:26)
23:27		YHWH “chooses” a place for his “name” to be “there” שם “there” + שם “name” + בחר	12:5, 11, 21; 14:23, 24; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2

concerning us” (2 Kgs 22:13). This alludes to a specific formulation from Moses’ curses in Deut 28:58, “if you do not observe to act according to all the words of this law that are written in this book...”²⁹ These words introduce the final section of Moses’ curses, which announces exile (Deut 28:63–64)³⁰ and the return to Egypt (28:68).³¹ This allusion prepares readers who are familiar with Deuteronomy 28 for the destructive ending of the narrative of Kings—exile (2 Kgs 25:11) and the flight to Egypt (25:26).³² Deuteronomy 28:58 is also alluded to in a second decisive passage, when Josiah makes the covenant in 2 Kgs 23:3, “to fulfill the words of this covenant that were written in this book.”

Two more possible allusions to Deuteronomy 28 can be seen in Huldah’s oracle in 2 Kgs 22:17, 19.³³ “Because they have abandoned me” (תחת אשר עזבוני) is the

²⁹See Glatt-Gilad, “Revealed and Concealed,” 193–94.

³⁰Norbert Lohfink argues that the final verses of Moses’ curses (Deut 28:64–68) reinterpret the meaning of שמד (28:63) from annihilation to dispersion into exile and therefore prepare the theological interpretation of Israel’s history, which is presented at the end of Kings (“Der Zorn Gottes und das Exil,” in idem, *Studien zum Deuteronomium und zur deuteronomistischen Literatur V* [SBAB 31; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2005], 37–55, esp. 52–54; repr. from *Liebe und Gebot: Studien zum Deuteronomium* [ed. Reinhard G. Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann; FRLANT 190; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000], 137–55).

³¹On the connection of Deut 28:68 with Deut 17:16 and the motif of the anti-exodus in general, see Thomas Römer, “Exode et anti-Exode: La nostalgie de l’Égypte dans les traditions du désert,” in *Lectio difficilior probabilior? L’Exégèse comme expérience de décloisonnement. Mélanges offerts à Françoise Smyth-Florentin* (ed. Thomas Römer; Dielheimer Blätter zum Alten Testament und seiner Rezeption in der Alten Kirche 12; Heidelberg: Wissenschaftliche Theol. Seminar, 1991), 155–72.

³²One of the few commentaries to emphasize this connection is Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah, With a New English Translation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 653. Compare also Jer 42:1–43:7: Garrett Galvin, *Egypt as a Place of Refuge* (FAT 2/51; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 136–37.

³³Lowell K. Handy explains Huldah’s role as a “double-check on the will of the deity” from parallels with texts from Esarhaddon and Nabonidus (“The Role of Huldah in Josiah’s Cult Reform,” ZAW 106 [1994]: 52). While these parallels are interesting, the conclusion that Huldah’s

first reason given in the oracle for God's wrath. A very similar expression occurs in Deut 28:20, "because you have abandoned me" (אשר עזבתני), where God's voice bursts through Moses' curses. The same idea reappears in the theophany in Deut 31:16 "and they will abandon me" (ועזבוני). Although the expression is very brief, its decisive content and the powerful literary device of the change of voices employed in Deut 28:20 make it a catchword and an easily recognizable allusion. In addition, "to provoke me with all the deeds of their hands" recalls Deut 31:29, Moses' final announcement of his knowledge of Israel's future sin.

Furthermore, Huldah's oracle refers to the words that the king had heard, saying that Jerusalem and its inhabitants would become "a desolation and a curse" (2 Kgs 22:19), which may well echo Moses' words "you shall be a desolation, a proverb, and a byword" (Deut 28:37) and may, through the term "curse," comprehensively refer to the Mosaic curses.

Finally, even the introduction to Huldah's oracle may recall Deuteronomy 28 via Deut 30:1. The beginning of God's word in 2 Kgs 22:16 reads, "I will indeed bring disaster upon this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read." The expression "bring upon" (בוא על *hiphil*) in combination with "words" (דברים) may evoke Deut 30:1, "when all these words have come upon you [בוא על *gal*]³⁴—the blessing and the curse," which clearly refers to the curses of Deuteronomy 28.

It is commonly acknowledged that Josiah's reform (2 Kings 23) converges with concerns of Deuteronomy.³⁴ Intertextual connections can be seen, for example, in Josiah's command to celebrate a Passover (2 Kgs 23:21; cf. Deut 16:1) and in the narrator's concluding summary in 2 Kgs 23:24. Josiah is depicted as putting away "detestable things and idols," a rare expression from Moses' Moab covenant speech (Deut 29:16), to establish "the words of the torah written upon the book," which employs typical phraseology from Deuteronomy but may again especially recall the Moab covenant (Deut 29:20).

We find further particularly significant allusions to Deuteronomy in the

"prophecy is a very bland stereotypical couple of phrases which could have been found anywhere in the ancient Near East" (p. 51) is imprecise. As shown above, the prophecy specifically refers to formulations in Deuteronomy. Thus, Huldah's prophecy reveals some of the content of the discovered book to the readers of Kings and confirms the continuity of the divine will with the prophecies of Moses. On the function of Huldah's oracle as a *vaticinium ex eventu*, see Michael Pietsch, "Prophetess of Doom: Hermeneutical Reflections on the Huldah Oracle (2 Kings 22)," in *Soundings in Kings: Perspectives and Methods in Contemporary Scholarship* (ed. Mark Leuchter and Klaus-Peter Adam; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 71–80, esp. 72–78.

³⁴Recently, Lauren A. S. Monroe argued that Josiah's reform in 2 Kgs 23:4–20 shows connections with concerns expressed in the Holiness Code (*Josiah's Reform and the Dynamics of Defilement: Israelite Rites of Violence and the Making of a Biblical Text* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 23–43). Yet she also sees a Deuteronomistic redaction in 2 Kings 22–23 (pp. 77–119) and does not doubt that the exilic (or, as she calls it, "postmonarchic") form of the text refers to Deuteronomy (p. 133).

evaluation of Josiah's reign in 2 Kgs 23:25–27. “Before him there was no king like him, who turned to YHWH with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might” (v. 25) combines easily recognizable expressions from Deut 6:4 and Deut 30:2, 10. According to Deuteronomy 30, this sort of repentance will come along with God's conversion to compassion (30:3, 9), but only after “all these things have come upon you” (30:1). However, 2 Kgs 23:26 is quick to add that “YHWH did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath,” which again evokes a decisive passage, Deut 13:18. There Moses demands that a town where idolatry had been committed must be totally eradicated “so that YHWH may turn from his fierce anger.”

In the light of this, Deuteronomy 13 seems to serve as an explanation of why Jerusalem could not be saved despite Josiah's wholehearted and active repentance. It seems that only a total eradication of Jerusalem, and any other town where idolatry had been committed, could have spared Judah from external destruction. This intertextual allusion to Deut 13:18, therefore, explains why God declares, “I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel; I will reject this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there” (2 Kgs 23:27). Needless to say, the wording is again deeply rooted in, and reminiscent of, Deuteronomy.³⁵

The complex intertextual relationship between 2 Kings 22–23 and Deuteronomy should be analyzed in greater detail, and, indeed, there are numerous additional connections with Deuteronomy in earlier chapters of Kings. For the purpose of the present argument, however, it has become sufficiently evident that readers of 2 Kings 22–23 are emphatically referred to Deuteronomy: first through the metatextual reference to the “book of the torah,” and then through several intertextual allusions that are concentrated in Josiah's reaction to hearing the words of the book (2 Kgs 22:13), Huldah's oracle concerning the future of Judah (2 Kgs 22:16–19), and the framing passages of Josiah's reform (2 Kgs 23:3 and 24–27).

The allusions refer especially to passages that are related to the disastrous end that awaits Israel in the case of its disobedience (Deuteronomy 28–31). Besides the curses in ch. 28, the issue of repentance in ch. 30 is also addressed, precisely to explain why Josiah's conversion could not rescue Judah and Jerusalem. Although there are clear allusions to Deut 30:1–10, the actual possibility of the restoration of God's people that is unfolded in these verses is completely missing from 2 Kings 22–23. At this point, readers of Kings, who have been left in suspense regarding the concrete content of the discovered book,³⁶ are supposed to remember and take to heart what Moses envisions for their future in Deuteronomy.

³⁵Moreover, this formulation draws on 1 Kgs 9:6–9, which plays on Deut 29:21–27.

³⁶See Burke O. Long, *2 Kings* (FOTL 10; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 262: “Obviously the account does not divulge the exact contents of the ‘book.’ Emphasis falls instead on dramatizing the responses to it.” The dramatic responses to the reading of the book even heighten readers' curiosity regarding its content. See also Venema, *Reading Scripture*, 72, who suggests that the lack

3. The Chance of the Moab Covenant (Deuteronomy 29–30)

Readers of Kings will remember that Moses refers to Israel's more distant future especially in three extended passages of his farewell speeches in Deuteronomy: 4:25–31; 28:15–68; 29:17–30:10.³⁷ But in these passages exile is explicitly presented as the ultimate consequence in the case of Israel's faithlessness. The full scheme of Deuteronomy's view of Israel's future leads from sin to exile, repentance, and restoration. However, Moses discusses only those elements of the scheme that fit the rhetorical purpose of the respective stage of his speeches:

<i>Deuteronomy</i>	<i>Sin</i>	→ <i>Exile</i>	→ <i>Repentance</i>	→ <i>Restoration</i>
4:25–31	4:25 (idolatry)	4:26–28	4:29–31	-
28:15–68	28:15, 58 (disobedience)	28:64–68	-	-
29:17–30:10	29:18, 25–26 (faithlessness)	29:28	30:1–2	30:3–10

In his first glimpse into the future, which circles around the theme of idolatry as a decisive reason for a disaster, Moses already mentions the repentance in exile (4:25–31). Yet the curse section of Deuteronomy 28 elaborates on the aspects of disobedience and its disastrous consequences, and it does not seem to leave room for any hope. Deuteronomy 30:1–10 is the only passage in which Moses presents a prospect of restoration. Readers who wish to know how possible restoration may happen are bound to remember the context of this passage, which is the Moab covenant speech, chs. 29–30.

Deuteronomy 29–30 is the rhetorical culmination of the entire sequence of speeches in chs. 1–30, which aims at the decision for life, that is, the decision for YHWH, YHWH's torah, and YHWH's covenant in 30:15–20.³⁸ Moses starts with a usual rhetorical figure, reminding Israel of YHWH's deeds for them in the desert,

of detail regarding the circumstances of the finding of the book in 2 Kings 22 refers readers to a known book.

³⁷I am not discussing here the special case of the Song of Moses (Deut 32:1–43), which is introduced as an additional revelation through the theophany in 31:16–21. This Song refers to the crisis in Israel's future (32:19–33) and God's final defeat of Israel's enemies (32:34–43). However, there is no direct reference to Israel's return from exile. See Dominik Markl, *Gottes Volk im Deuteronomium* (BZABR 18; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 232–42.

³⁸For a more elaborate argument on this reading of chs. 29–30, see Markl, *Gottes Volk*, 88–125; for a detailed rhetorical analysis, see Timothy A. Lenchak, "Choose Life!" *A Rhetorical-Critical Investigation of Deuteronomy 28,69–30,20* (AnBib 129; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993).

for which the people shall obey the stipulations of the covenant (29:1–8). He then addresses all the people, those present and even absent members of the people (that is, most probably future generations, 29:9–14).

Moses then reminds Israel of the idols they have seen among other nations (29:15–16) and begins to unfold the disastrous consequences of possible hidden false oaths among the people (29:17–27). In an imaginary future dialogue, Moses quotes “all nations,” asking why this calamity has come upon the land (29:23), to which the answer is given: “Because they forsook the covenant of YHWH ... the anger of YHWH was kindled against that land, bringing on it every curse written in this book. YHWH uprooted them from their land in anger, fury, and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as is the case today” (29:24–27).

The final two verses employ two special features of “direct” communication with addressees of the text: the reference to the book (which is part of the book of Deuteronomy that addressees are reading, 29:26) and the “today” of exile. The speech of Moses, although suited to its context within the narrated world of Deuteronomy, is designed unmistakably to perforate the thin screen that separates it from the world of addressees who are experiencing (or have experienced) the reality of exile.

This strategy of reader communication is further developed in a subtle trick of Deut 30:1:³⁹ “And it will happen, when all these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse ...” Again, this sentence not only addresses Moses’ audience within Deuteronomy, but it must be felt to be a direct address also to readers who understand that the curse has in fact come upon them. This virtually immediate address to readers continues as they are told of their possible (or actual) experience of repentance and return to their home country (30:1–10).⁴⁰ The same address, “you” (singular), is continued until the end of Moses’ speech, in which addressees finally are urged to make a decision between life and death:⁴¹ “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving YHWH your God, obeying him” (30:19–20).

Despite this forceful rhetorical demand, we are not told in Deuteronomy

³⁹For this and other strategies of reader communication in Deuteronomy, see Markl, *Gottes Volk*, 70–81.

⁴⁰For a detailed analysis of Deut 30:1–10 that is skillfully developed around the leitmotif “to turn” (שׁוּב), see Gottfried Vanoni, “Geist und Buchstabe: Überlegungen zum Verhältnis der beiden Testamente und Beobachtungen zu Dtn 30,1–10,” *BN* 14 (1981): 65–98. The root שׁוּב appears seven times in this passage; see Georg Braulik, “Die Funktion von Siebenergruppierungen im Endtext des Deuteronomiums,” in idem, *Studien zum Buch Deuteronomium* (SBAB 24; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1997), 63–79, esp. 65.

⁴¹“Life/to live” occurs six times in Deut 30:15–20 (and a seventh time in 30:6), highlighting life as the aim of torah; see Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* דְּבָרִים: *The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 287.

about Israel's response.⁴² This response is expected from exilic (or postexilic) readers. Though there is no indication of this response in the narrative, there seems to be a response suggested to readers implied in the text at its turning point: "The hidden things belong to YHWH our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to observe all the words of this law" (29:28).⁴³

Deuteronomy 29–30 constructs its implicit audience as a community that is supposed to identify with experiencing a situation of exile at the turning point to restoration (29:24–30:10). These chapters encourage the people to commit themselves to the Moab covenant and the torah of Deuteronomy. While the decisive turn to their obedience is seen as an act of divine grace, the circumcision of the heart (30:6),⁴⁴ they are also urged with the greatest rhetorical intensity to make a deliberate decision for God and God's torah (30:15–20).

4. No Future without Moses: The Pragmatic Function of 2 Kings 22–25

Against the backdrop of the foregoing observations, I suggest an interpretation of the pragmatic function of the end of Kings. 2 Kings 22–23 is decisive in DtrH's "account before the tribunal of divine justice,"⁴⁵ since the law book at this tribunal is Deuteronomy. 2 Kings 22–23 explains both why the disaster *had to happen* and why it had to happen *despite* the efforts of the uniquely just king Josiah.⁴⁶

⁴²In fact, there could be an indirect indication of Israel's decision in Deut 34:9, which reports Israel's actual obedience. See Sonnet, "Redefining the Plot."

⁴³The "revealed things" (הנגלת) are obviously equated with the torah, while the meaning of "hidden things" (הנסתרת) is more difficult to determine. For a thorough treatment of the verse, see Alan Lenzi, *Secrecy and the Gods: Secret Knowledge in Ancient Mesopotamia and Biblical Israel* (SAAS 19; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2008), 322–39, with a convincing analysis of the meaning of הנסתרת based on a comparison of the usages of the word in Sir 3:22; 42:19; 48:24–25 (pp. 328–33). Lenzi emphasizes the opposition between the hidden and the revealed things and their possible implications. My understanding of the verse, however, proposes that it aims at the self-commitment of a we-group to obey the torah; therefore, the verse may have a function for the making of the Moab covenant that is comparable to the consent and ratification of Israel in the making of the Sinai covenant (Exod 19:8; 24:3, 7); see Markl, *Gottes Volk*, 104–7.

⁴⁴On the theologically decisive meaning of this motif at the end of the Pentateuch, see Ernst Ehrenreich, *Wähle das Leben! Deuteronomium 30 als hermeneutischer Schlüssel zur Tora* (BZABR 14; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 183 and 196–97.

⁴⁵Jan Assmann calls DtrH a "Rechenschaft vor dem Tribunal der göttlichen Gerechtigkeit" ("Die Erzählbarkeit der Geschichte: Bedingungen für die Entstehung von Geschichte im alten Orient," in *Die Vielfalt der Kulturen* [ed. Jörn Rüsen, Michael Gottlob, and Achim Mittag; Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität 4; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998], 392).

⁴⁶The story makes every effort to depict a consistent image of God and history and not to subvert the idea in "Deut 30 that repentance must precede return" (contra Janzen, *Violent Gift*, 204–5).

It has long been recognized that the final passage, 2 Kgs 23:31–25:26, is marked by a dry and even laconic style.⁴⁷ It merely tells what *had* to happen. Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah are portrayed as supernumeraries, preparing the scene for Nebuchadnezzar. 2 Kings 24:20 resumes the central motif of divine wrath⁴⁸ and leads to the account of the destruction of Jerusalem. Chapter 25 leaves the Judeans exiled in Babylon or having fled to Egypt; the latter can be seen as the fulfillment of the metaphorically hyperbolized final curse of Deut 28:68: “YHWH will bring you back in ships to Egypt, by a route that I promised you would never see again.”

If the real purpose of the DtrH was, as Noth suggested, to explain the disaster of the exile as divine judgment, this aim would have indeed been achieved. Yet what sort of reader could be imagined who could have been satisfied with this explanation? Who could be that theoretical theologian who would be happy if God was finally justified and a blind, former king got his daily food supply? Any readers who were personally affected by this story or empathized with the figures involved must have asked themselves: What about the future? What about the people? What about *us*?

Whoever may seriously ask this question is not given any answer at the end of Kings. Yet this question may remind readers that precisely the disaster presented at the end of Kings proves the accuracy of a lost and rediscovered book, the book of the torah of Moses. Therefore, the metatextual references and intertextual allusions in 2 Kings 22–23 and the subsequent unsatisfying end of 2 Kings 24–25 together are seen as implicitly urging readers to reread Deuteronomy. Whoever wants to know an answer to the question of what chance there may be for the future will find it in Moses’ speech in Deuteronomy 29–30.⁴⁹

There is no happy ending that can be gained cheaply. Whoever wants to be consoled by a message of hope is forced to turn to Moses’ rhetoric of blessing and curse and heaven and earth as witnesses as they make their decision between life

⁴⁷See Weippert, “Das deuteronomistische Geschichtswerk,” 238–39. Richard D. Nelson refers to “the wooden phrases which evaluate the last four kings” (*The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* [JSOTSup 18; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981], 37). It should not be overlooked that one of the last theological reasons given in 2 Kgs 24:4, that YHWH did “not want to forgive,” forms an exclusive intertextual connection with Deut 29:19. The combination of the two verbs (אָבָה + סָלַח) occurs only in these two verses in the canon. 2 Kings 24:2 therefore again alludes to the Moab covenant speech, precisely where Moses begins to speak about the disastrous consequences of breaking the covenant. The connection between Deut 29:19 and 2 Kgs 24:4 is thus much stronger than even Vanoni’s thorough analysis of deuteronomistic terminology suggests: compare, e.g., G. Vanoni, “Beobachtungen zur deuteronomistischen Terminologie in 2 Kön 23,25–25,30,” in *Das Deuteronomium: Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft* (ed. N. Lohfink; BETL 68; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1985), 357–62, esp. 361.

⁴⁸See Lohfink, “Zorn Gottes.”

⁴⁹Within the narrative complex from Genesis to Kings, the answer can be found only in Deuteronomy 29–30.

and death. This ingenious metatextual and literary-pragmatic function of the ending of Kings is the reason why this ending was preserved and why no happy ending was added. The reconstitution of “Israel” as the people of God depended on the constant memory of the catastrophe and its moral impact that is rhetorically condensed in Deuteronomy 29–30. Moses, and not the narrator of Israel’s history, has the “last word” regarding Israel’s future.⁵⁰ The DtrH does not serve the purpose of amusement, but it is meant to remain a thorn in the side of its readers. Even at the end of Kings, the Deuteronomistic narrator serves the purpose of enhancing Mosaic authority.

5. Hermeneutical Perspectives: The Torah Book and the Composition of the Canon

As a postlude, these final reflections will just hint at a few points that have, because of my concentration on the issue at stake, not been discussed in this article but which still seem to be of hermeneutical significance.

I have not addressed the complex questions concerning the literary history in which the texts concerned evolved.⁵¹ However, it should be noted that there are many good reasons to assume that several passages in Deuteronomy 30–34 were deliberately composed to conclude the Pentateuch,⁵² which gained its special

⁵⁰Thus, the whole narrative arc from Deuteronomy to Kings must be taken into consideration if one is to analyze the relationship of authority between the narrator and Moses—an undertaking begun by Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History*, part 1, *Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges* (New York: Seabury, 1980), esp. 25–36.

⁵¹See, e.g., *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research* (ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Konrad Schmid, and Baruch J. Schwartz; FAT 78; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Hermann-Josef Stipp, *Das deuteronomistische Geschichtswerk* (ÖBS 39; Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 2011); *Die deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerke: Redaktions- und religionsgeschichtliche Perspektiven zur “Deuteronomismus”: Diskussion in Tora und Vorderen Propheten* (ed. Markus Witte et al.; BZAW 365; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006); Konrad Schmid, “Das Deuteronomium innerhalb der ‘deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerke’ in Gen–2 Kön,” in *Das Deuteronomium zwischen Pentateuch und Deuteronomistischem Geschichtswerk* (ed. Eckart Otto and Reinhard Achenbach; FRLANT 206; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 193–211; *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History* (ed. Thomas Römer; BETL 147; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000); *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research* (ed. Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer, and Jean-Daniel Macchi; JSOTSup 306; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

⁵²See, e.g., Eckart Otto, “Das postdeuteronomistische Deuteronomium als integrierender Schlußstein der Tora,” in idem, *Die Tora: Studien zum Pentateuch: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (BZABR 9; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 421–46; reprinted from Witte et al., *Die deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerke*, 71–102. See also Markl, *Gottes Volk*, 282–85, with references to further literature.

hermeneutical role during Persian times.⁵³ Although this literary process meant to some degree a separation of the Pentateuch from the books of the Former Prophets, it seems that, at this late stage, the Former Prophets were not meant to be read in isolation from their prehistory presented in the Pentateuch, nor without their theological foundation, which Deuteronomy provides. It is therefore not necessary to presuppose a theory of DtrH or the Enneateuch to accept the argument presented here.

Moses' "book of the torah" provides a narrative motif that connects especially Joshua and Kings with Deuteronomy.⁵⁴ If one reads the narratives from Genesis to Kings as a unified historical work, Deuteronomy 30 appears at the center of the narrative plot. It is the most prominent passage of this narrative complex, in which a future beyond Kings (beyond exile) is envisioned.⁵⁵ Readers witness the writing of the "book of the torah" in Deuteronomy immediately after Moses' solemn predictions regarding Israel's future (Deut 31:9), while they see it resurfacing just before the "end of history" (2 Kgs 22:9). Israel's foundation, which is coming to an end with Moses' writing of his testament, becomes the anchor for any possible hope at the end of the narrative complex. While Israel is doomed to dispersion, the new emergence of the book becomes the foundation for the future.⁵⁶ Viewed in this light, the "word" of Deuteronomy is for postexilic "Israel" nothing less than "your life, and through this word you may live long in the land" (Deut 32:47).⁵⁷

From a canonical perspective, Konrad Schmid emphasized that Genesis to Kings "in the arrangement of the MT ... segues into the account of the *corpus propheticum*, where we encounter decisive statements about Israel's future."⁵⁸ Thus, Israel's future, which is left unclear by the open end of 2 Kgs 25:27–30, "is the subject of extensive theological discussion and exploration in the subsequent

⁵³ See James W. Watts, "Using Ezra's Time as a Methodological Pivot for Understanding the Rhetoric and Functions of the Pentateuch," in Dozeman et al., *Pentateuch: International Perspectives*, 489–506.

⁵⁴ Compare Venema, *Reading Scripture*, 47–52; Glatt-Gilad, "Revealed and Concealed." On further implications of this intertextual game, exemplified in 1 Kings 8, see David A. Bergen, "The Heart of the (Deuteronomic) Matter: Solomon and the Book of the Law," *SR* 35 (2006): 213–30.

⁵⁵ Although Lev 26:42–45 implies the possibility of restoration, only Deut 30:1–10 explicitly speaks about the return to the land.

⁵⁶ Römer, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 51: "The 'cleansing' of the temple was indeed of not much use, since it was destroyed a few decades later. But the discovery of the book offered the possibility to *understand* this destruction, and to worship Yahweh *without any temple*" (emphasis original).

⁵⁷ On the significance of these concluding "words" of Moses (cf. Deut 32:45), see my "This Word Is Your Life: The Theology of 'Life' in Deuteronomy," in *Gottes Wort im Menschenwort: Festschrift für Georg Fischer SJ zum 60. Geburtstag* (ed. Dominik Markl, Claudia Paganini, and Simone Paganini; ÖBS 43; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2014), 71–96, esp. 88–89, 92–93.

⁵⁸ Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible* (trans. James D. Nogalski; Siphrut 3; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 44.

prophetic books.”⁵⁹ This hermeneutical perspective gains strength mainly through the intertextual connections between the end of Kings and especially Isaiah and Jeremiah.⁶⁰ Isaiah 36–39, the structural center of the book,⁶¹ renders and expands 2 Kgs 18:13–20:19, while Jeremiah 52 reuses and expands 2 Kgs 24:18–25:30.⁶² These extensive intertextual references emphasize that both Isaiah and Jeremiah are strongly concerned with the fate of Judah and Jerusalem.

Important though these observations are, they must not obscure the fact that 2 Kings 25 *really is* an end. It is the end of the most extensive narrative complex of the Bible. One cannot overestimate the audaciousness of the authors and redactors who have shaped and preserved this drastic ending—who did not fall into the nearly universal psychological trap of self-admiring historiography. Both Chronicles and the Gospel of Mark give textual evidence of how unbearable a traumatic and open ending was perceived to be in biblical times⁶³ (which probably has not changed among recipients today).

Maybe the original author(s) of 2 Kings 25 really did have the attitude of a “mandarin,” as in Römer’s application of Steil’s typology. Yet the latest redactor(s) of Kings shifted this attitude. By preserving the laconic end, the narrator seems to hide in the mantle of a “mandarin,” while blinking both eyes back and forth: one eye of a “priest” blinks back to Moses in Deuteronomy, the other eye of a “prophet” twinkles forward to Isaiah and Jeremiah. It is perhaps the ambivalence of simultaneously preserving real seriousness and sublimely conveying irony, which marks great literature and maybe even profound theology.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ The canonical sequence as such may well have been more pluralistic than Schmid suggests; compare Norbert Lohfink, “Moses Tod, die Tora und die alttestamentliche Sonntagslesung,” *TP* 71 (1996): 481–94.

⁶¹ See Ulrich Berges, *The Book of Isaiah: Its Composition and Final Form* (trans. Millard C. Lind; Hebrew Bible Monographs 46; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), esp. 505: “The suppression of the exile events, which appear as already overcome only in the hindsight of history (40.1–11), displays the pragmatics of chaps. 36–39 with perfect clarity. In the book of Isaiah, Zion cannot fall, the temple cannot burn.... The entire book takes its direction from this thematic center.”

⁶² Georg Fischer, *Jeremia: Der Stand der theologischen Diskussion* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007), 27–31; idem, “Jeremiah 52: A Test Case for Jer LXX,” in *X. Congress of the International Organisation for Septuagint and Cognate Studies, Oslo, 1998* (ed. Bernard A. Taylor; SCS 51; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 37–48.

⁶³ 2 Chronicles 36:22–23 adds to the end of the plot of 2 Kings 25 Cyrus’s edict and announcement of the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem and thus ends on a glorious note of restoration. Mark 16:9–20 is most probably a secondary addition to an earlier, shorter ending of the Gospel. See, e.g., Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Yale Bible 27A; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 1088–89.