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Gakuru, Griphus

An Inner-Biblical Exegetical Study of the Davidic Covenant and the Dynastic Oracle

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In recent years biblical scholarship has paid special attention to the phenomenon of innerbiblical exegesis, or reception history. Within this broader context two monographs on the reception history of the Nathan oracle (2 Sam 7) have recently been published. Whereas William Schniedewind (*Society and the Promise to David* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1999]) analyzes the sociohistorical changes in Israelite society that led to the multiple perceptions of the Nathan oracle, Griphus Gakuru asks for the Davidic covenant's development as a *theological* theme in the Hebrew Bible. The main problem associated with such kind of studies is the diachronic issue, which is quite controversial with respect to nearly every text under consideration. The following remarks will, therefore, pay special attention to historical and literary reconstructions, since they are the basis of every reception-*historical* study.

According to Gakuru, the main problems associated with the dynastic oracle are: (1) the question as to which of the biblical passages (2 Sam 7; Pss 89; 132; or 1 Chr 17) represents the "original" version of the oracle; (2) the dichotomy between conditionality and unconditionality within the biblical traditions; and (3) whether David was promised one son or a succession of sons to succeed him on the throne of Israel.

Before dealing with the problem of the "original" core of the promise to David, the author examines the ideas of *b^erît*, kingship, and dynasty in the ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Bible (15–47). Within this chapter Gakuru makes some presuppositions that strongly influence his further argumentation. First, he defines *b^erît* as "a (obligatory) relationship which is intended to be inviolable." This definition allows him to speak of the dynastic oracle as a covenant, even though the term *b^erît* does not occur in 2 Sam 7. Both the Davidic covenant and the dynastic oracle would refer to the same event. Second, he argues that during the time of the early monarchy in Israel the idea of charismatic leadership was so strong that the promise not just of a direct successor to the throne but of a dynasty was not yet conceivable. Therefore, the "original" oracle delivered to David

was only about his son succeeding him to the throne. However, this argument is far from convincing, since the idea of a dynastic principle is well attested in Syria-Palestine since the Middle Bronze Age. Moreover, had such an opposition between a charismatic and a dynastic principle really existed in Israel at that time, one would expect it to be comprehensive in character.

Gakuru identifies the “original” text of the dynastic oracle as consisting of 2 Sam 7, 8a β , 9–11, 16, 12, 13b–15. He builds his argument primarily on form-critical grounds, especially on a comparison with two Neo-Assyrian prophecies from the seventh century B.C.E. (K 4310 III:15–V:11 and V:26–VI:31; see Manfred Weippert, “Assyrische Prophetien der Zeit Esarhaddons und Assurbanipals,” in *Assyrian Royal Inscriptions* [ed. F. M. Fales; Rome: Istituto per l’Oriente, Centro per le antichità e la storia dell’arte del vicino, 1981], 71–115); he labels it “a dynastic oracle of salvation.” Gakuru associates the *Sitz im Leben* of this unconditional dynastic oracle with the introduction of the ark to Jerusalem as it is attested in 2 Sam 6–7 and Ps 132. The main problem of this diachronic analysis is its one-sided form-critical approach. A closer literary analysis of the chapter shows that 2 Sam 7:8–17* is neither a homogenous unit (e.g., 7:9b–11a), nor can it be separated from its literary context. An older kernel of the oracle certainly is preserved, most probably in 7:11b–12*, 14–16*, but it does not feature those form-critical elements that are characteristic of the Neo-Assyrian oracles of salvation. In addition, the transposition of 7:16 after 7:12 is based on the author’s presupposition that the oracle referred originally only to David’s son, Solomon. It has, therefore, no basis in the text itself.

According to Gakuru, the first step to transform the dynastic promise into a covenant (*b^erit*) was taken by David himself, who in 2 Sam 23:4–5 would have introduced the idea of conditionality to the promise. However, the date of the “last words of David” in 2 Sam 23:1–7 is highly disputed; therefore, Gakuru’s argument is not based on firm ground. He is right, however, in stating that 2 Sam 23:1–7 belongs to the group of texts that conditionalize the promise.

Following the analysis of Samuel and Kings by A. F. Campbell (*Of Prophets and Kings* [Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1986]), Gakuru assumes that northern prophetic circles, motivated by a polemic against the Jerusalem temple and the Davidic dynasty, were responsible for the insertion of the temple-building prohibition in

2 Sam 7:1a, 2–3, 5a β , b, 7b. Later on, the same groups would have added 7:6–7a as a midrash on the rhetorical question in 7:5a and as a response to the establishment of a strong royal Zion ideology in Judah (as represented, e.g., in Ps 132). Gakuru is right in arguing against a Deuteronomistic origin of 7:6–7, since these verses contradict the

Deuteronomistic doctrine of cult centralization. The problem remains, however, that northern prophetic circles (Elijah, Elisha) never polemicized against the Jerusalem temple. As far as we know, the polemic of these groups was directed against the northern kingdom and its cultic practices. Another proposal would be that 7:6-7 are of a later, post-Deuteronomistic origin associated with the problems of the rebuilding of the temple at the end of the sixth century B.C.E.

As pointed out above, the author supposes that the originally unconditional promise first became conditional as attested in 2 Sam 23 and Ps 132 (132:11-12?); later on in preexilic times, the promise would have become dynastic and “eternal.” This stage would be represented by the prophetic oracle in Ps 89:20–38, which interprets the promise to David in covenantal terms and is dated by Gakuru to the monarchic period. The main problem with this reconstruction is that both texts that are referred to as witnesses for an early conditionalizing of the promise (2 Sam 23; Ps 132) most probably originated only in postexilic times. Despite the presence of elements of obligation in the oracle itself (cf. 2 Sam 7:14-15), its conditional form is attested in biblical texts only in the exilic period (see 1-2 Kgs; Ps 89:30–34).

With respect to the Deuteronomistic texts, Gakuru distinguishes an early Josianic redaction from a later exilic one but argues for a unified concept of the Davidic covenant in all these texts. The Deuteronomists would have understood the promise as unconditional in nature, according to 2 Sam 7, and as “eternal.” The conditional series of texts within the Deuteronomistic History only functions to emphasize the punishment of the kings (e.g., the division of the monarchy after Solomon’s death), but the promise is still valid and the Davidic monarchy is hoped to be restored (see 2 Kgs 25:25–27). However, Gakuru’s interpretation of 2 Kgs 25:25–27 is questionable, and the conditional passages do not refer to the punishment of the king(s) but to the validity of the promise. It seems that the different layers within the Deuteronomistic History do not in every respect share the same ideology.

Many of the prophetic texts discussed by Gakuru lack a clear linkage to the Davidic promise. They rather deal with the Davidic monarchy in different respects. Nevertheless, two observations seem to be important. (1) The much-discussed problem of the relationship between the Davidic and the Sinaitic covenants was, according to Gakuru, first established by the prophet Jeremiah, who interpreted the Davidic covenant as subject to the Sinaitic covenant (see also Ezekiel). Later on Deutero-Isaiah transferred the promise entirely to the people of Israel, if they were willing to turn to YHWH. (2) On the other hand, Isaiah and Micah applied the dynastic promise to a single, individual ruler who would rule in righteousness and deliver God’s blessings to Israel but would not necessarily be of Davidic descent(see Isa 11:1–10; Mic 5:1–5*). Of course, with

reference to these latter texts it seems questionable whether they allude to the promise at all.

Contrary to these developments, the Chronicler read the dynastic oracle as a homiletic tool for the restoration community: the dynasty was built because of the need of the temple and proper worship (see 1 Chr 17:14).

After all, the Davidic covenant is a cluster of multiple interpretations of the dynastic oracle due to various historical, political, and religious factors, rather than a single event or a standardized theme in the Hebrew Bible. Dr. Gakuru's book makes a significant contribution in illustrating the complexity and variety of interpretations the promise to David has evoked, even if the development of this interpretation still needs to be debated.