

RBL 04/2009



Taschner, Johannes

Die Mosereden im Deuteronomium: Eine kanonorientierte Untersuchung

Forschungen zum Alten Testament 59

Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008. Pp. xii + 402. Cloth.
€94.00. ISBN 3161496442.

Dominik Markl, S.J.

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München
Munich, Germany

This *Habilitationsschrift* was approved by the Protestant College of Theology Bethel and stands in the tradition of Frank Crüsemann, whose book on the Torah is well known. It was submitted in 2006 and considers the exegetical discussion only up to that year (vii), which is noteworthy because in the meantime relevant publications by Eckart Otto and others have come forward. Taschner had done already his dissertation with Crüsemann, a synchronic exegesis of the Jacob narrative in Genesis (*Verheißung und Erfüllung in der Jakoberzählung [Gen 25,19–33,17]: Eine Analyse ihres Spannungsbogens* [Herders Biblische Studien 27; Freiburg im Breisgau, 2000]). Now Taschner investigates mainly the framing passages of Deuteronomy that have been discussed considerably in recent debate.

The investigation is framed by an introduction (1–25) and a summary (337–39) where Taschner deals with the “actual issue” of his book: “what an actualized reading of Biblical texts means,” as he states in the foreword (vii). The book is divided into three main chapters. The first explains the hermeneutical and methodological approach (“Theoretische Grundlegung,” 26–71), while the second and the third provide exegetical investigations of the narrative passages in Deut 1–10 and 30 in comparison with their parallels in Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers (“Ein Geschehen—Zwei Versionen,” 72–261) as well as of texts relating to the Moab covenant, especially Deut 31 (“Der Moabbund,” 262–363).

Taschner's main interest and theses concern the function of Moses' retelling of history in the book of Deuteronomy (69–71). Based on the investigations done by Robert Polzin, Jean-Pierre Sonnet, Karin Finsterbusch, and Christof Hardmeier (18–25) concerning Moses' role as speaker and teacher in Deuteronomy, Taschner comes to the conclusion that Deuteronomy's Moses speaks as an authentic witness of the history he tells because he himself bears its consequences in his death in the plains of Moab (337). The two principal episodes that Moses narrates—the spy episode (Num 13–14; cf. Deut 1:20–46) and the covenant at Sinai/Horeb (Exod 19–34; cf. Deut 4; 5; 9–10)—are directly connected with the “homiletic situation” of Deuteronomy. In both of these experiences in the wilderness, Israel was given a second chance. Now the new generation stands at the border of the Promised Land and is on the verge of finally settling there, a goal that was missed by their parents. This deliberate recapitulation of history is an example for how remembrance can serve the future (338).

This well-grounded insight (see also 56–65) leads Taschner to interpret Deuteronomy as a “Lehrstunde der Geschichtsdidaktik” (339), a lesson in historical didactics. While it is true that Moses' speeches in Deuteronomy make use of historical didactics, Deuteronomy cannot be reduced merely to historical didactics (“nicht mehr und nicht weniger,” 339); Deuteronomy is of course at its very core also a collection of laws. The same applies to the overly generalized title of Taschner's work: He does not deal with the complete speeches of Moses in Deuteronomy (“*Die Mosereden im Deuteronomium*”) but only with their narrative passages.

In the first part of his introduction Taschner discusses some diachronic approaches to Deuteronomy (2–18), most particularly some of Eckart Otto's theories (5–16). In this context he unfolds a paradigmatic discussion about the relation between diachronic and synchronic methodology, which is strongly debated currently by German-speaking scholars. Whereas Otto holds that a synchronic approach to Deuteronomy has to trace back to the perspective of the final redaction of the Pentateuch (6 and 12), Taschner is weary of this view. Attributing certain passages and motifs to layers of redaction might lead one to underestimate the meaning of their actual context within the final form of the text (13–14). Otto has already responded thoroughly to these views (see his review: “Ist das Deuteronomium ‘nicht mehr und nicht weniger als eine ‘Lehrstunde der Geschichtsdidaktik’”? Zu einem Buch von Johannes Taschner,” *ZABR* 14 [2008]: 463–74; I will not here repeat Otto's observations).

According to his hermeneutical standpoint, Taschner tries to lay the foundations for a strictly (“konsequent,” 12) synchronic approach. First of all he explains his view of “‘canon’ as an essential aspect of Biblical exegesis” (26–42), which explains the book's subtitle. He combines Brevard Childs's canonical approach (26–28) and Wolfgang Iser's

theory of reading (30–34) with the important role that the religious community plays in interpreting the canonical text (39–42). In a second step, Taschner deals with the theory of history and narration. He refers to Jörn Rüsen’s four types of historical narration (43–46) as well as to Franz Stanzel’s three “Konstituenten” of “Modus,” “Person,” and “Perspective” (47–52). Against that background, he analyzes the biblical narrator (52–56) as well as Moses’ role as a narrator (56–65).

Taschner’s canonical hermeneutics are exemplified in the central part of his book. He compares the narratives of Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers with their retelling by Moses in Deuteronomy. After some considerations on the structure of Deuteronomy (72–86) and a survey of the narrative passages (86–98), he follows the narrative plot of Genesis to Numbers because following Deuteronomy’s sequence of arguments could be confusing (72). Starting with the patriarchal stories (98–115) he continues with the exodus (115–38), the reorganization of the judiciary (cf. Exod 18; Num 11 with Deut 1:9–18, pp. 153–90), the spy episode (190–19), and the covenant at Sinai / Horeb (219–61). The last major section of the book analyzes the relation between the covenants at Horeb and in Moab (262–93) and Deut 31 (293–363).

Taschner reaches the conclusion that, after going into exile, Israel has to return to the past, to the “day” of Deuteronomy. Despite the fact that Joshua is depicted as an ideal king, the end of 2 Kings does not betray any vision for Israel’s future. This vision, however, is presented in Deut 4:25–31 and 29:15–30:10. By linking the situation of the “exile” (here understood benevolently as the situation of the implicit addressee and not historically; see Otto’s critique, *ZABR* 14 [2008]: 471–72) to Deuteronomy’s “day” at the borders of the Promised Land (see 29:27), the people as a whole have to identify with the assembly in the plains of Moab (333) and listen anew to Moses’ Torah. Deuteronomy’s “day” is Israel’s “square one” (“Nullpunktsituation,” 333), its new beginning. Israel’s future lies in the past (332). Even more, in that very situation, Israel has to retell the exodus story (Deut 6:20–25). To realize its future, Israel has to go back to the beginning of its history (335: “Um Zukunft zu gewinnen, muss Israel an den Anfang seiner Geschichte ... zurückkehren”). Concise formulations such as these succeed in profiling Deuteronomy as a book at the threshold of eras (“Epochenschwellenbuch,” 70).

Although Taschner clearly explains his hermeneutical approach, its implementation is not always convincing because the concrete exegetical methods that are implicitly applied often remain unclear. As a first example for his intertextual reading, Taschner calls on Deut 26:19 (67). Moses’ statement obviously refers back to a proclamation made by God that cannot be found in Deuteronomy. Seemingly as a matter of course, Taschner compares the verse with Lev 19:2, which also contains God’s challenge to Israel to be holy. But why does he not take into consideration, for example, Lev 11:44–45 and 20:26, which

include similar formulations? And why does he not discuss Exod 19:5–6, to which Deut 29:15–16 most probably makes a deliberate reference, as Dieter Eduard Skweres has already shown (see his dissertation: *Die Rückverweise im Buch Deuteronomium* [AnBib 79; Rome, 1979], 176–78). These questions remain unanswered due to a lack of systematic linguistic analysis. Other weakly argued claims will leave the critical reader unsatisfied, such as concerning the hermeneutical significance of the Decalogue. Taschner confidently affirms that in Exodus none of the legal codes takes precedence over the others (256). This assumption seems to stand on a dogmatic adherence to Crüsemann's position, which cannot be so easily upheld after Crüsemann's exchange with Norbert Lohfink and after a more detailed theory of legal hermeneutics of the Pentateuch has been initiated by the latter. Deuteronomy 5:3, which is of crucial importance for the actualization of the Sinai covenant in Deuteronomy, also remains underestimated (see already C. Hardmeier, "Das Sch'ma' Jisra'el in Dtn 6,4 im Rahmen der Beziehungstheologie der deuteronomistischen Tora," in *Mincha: Festgabe für Rolf Rendtorff zum 75. Geburtstag* [ed. E. Blum; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2000], 61–92).

Moreover, an additional thorough proofreading of the manuscript could have improved the book. Two examples may suffice: "Der Umfang der zu lesenden Texte weichen erheblich voneinander ab" (286) is not easily understandable. The misquotation of Sonnet "The 'book' in question, being an element von Deuteronomy's represented world" (287) awkwardly mixes English with German. On the very same two pages the reader has to ignore further spelling errors and misquotations.

For the field of pentateuchal studies, Taschner's book is an important step toward a systematic comparison between the narratives from Genesis to Numbers and their retelling in Deuteronomy at the level of the final form of the text. As this review has tried to show, Taschner's realization of this task contains some important and helpful insights but also some problematic assertions that need further clarification. Because of this ambivalence, his work has already begun to stimulate discussion.